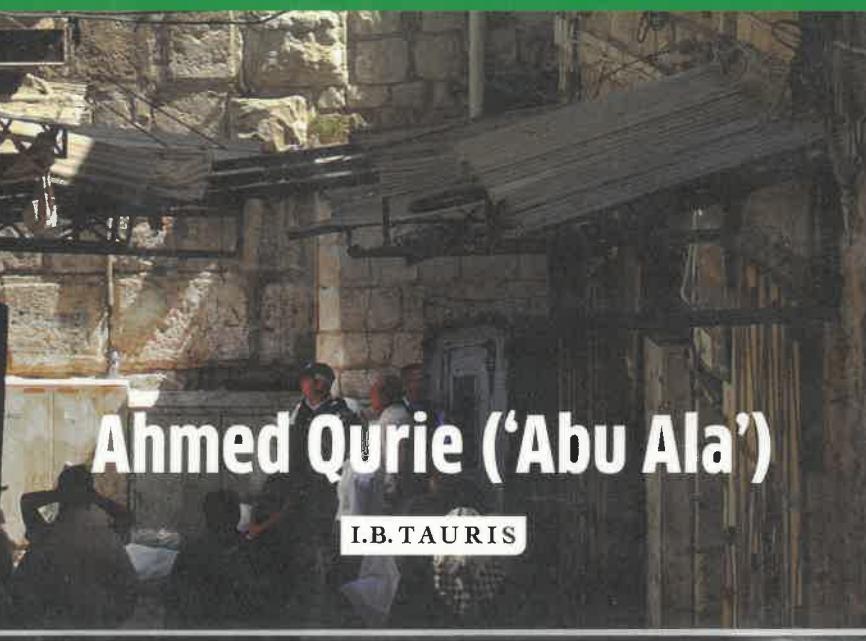


PEACE NEGOTIATIONS IN PALESTINE

From the Second Intifada
to the Roadmap



Ahmed Qurie ('Abu Ala')

I.B. TAURIS

The start of the twenty-first century in Palestine saw the collapse of Oslo give way to a turbulent period of dashed hope, escalating violence and internal division. Tracking developments from the Second Intifada to the Roadmap, former Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie provides intimate and firsthand detail of the monumental changes that have rocked the peace process and the region as a whole.

Starting with the events that triggered the Second Intifada, Qurie highlights how during this period, Islamic factions started to have more of a role in Palestinian politics. He furthermore honestly accounts for the failures of the more moderate elements to make themselves heard amidst a deteriorating and radicalising situation.

Concentrating on the Middle East peace process, he offers an account of new proposals in an attempt to ameliorate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as the Mitchell Report, the Tenet Plan, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Roadmap. He reveals the topics under discussion with both the international community and Israel, and the attempts at contact between the camps of Israeli Prime Ministers such as Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert and those of Yasser Arafat, and later Mahmoud Abbas. He also offers an account of the ways in which these attempts fell apart or failed, tracking their troubled trajectories from a close and privileged viewpoint.

The historic events that occurred during this period are also examined by Qurie, such as, the extended Israeli siege of Yasser Arafat, and the political manoeuvring which characterised this period, including a frank account of his own difficulties whilst Prime Minister. Qurie furthermore offers a firsthand account of the final hours of Arafat.

However, it is Qurie's unique position, one which is personal and yet also analytical and honest, that reveals a new and frank perspective of the peace negotiations and how they played out on the stages of Palestinian internal governance, regional politics and international diplomacy.



Ahmed Qurie ('Abu Ala') has been a leading member of the Palestinian negotiating team since the Oslo talks. He was Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority from November 2003 to January 2006. He is the author of *From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations* (2006) and *Beyond Oslo: Inside the Middle East Peace Process from Rabin's Death to Camp David* (2008), both published by I.B.Tauris.



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INTRODUCTION

This third instalment of my account of the process of negotiation between the Palestinians and Israel will cover the period between 2000 and 2006. First, however, I shall remind my readers of the events that led up to, accompanied and followed the Camp David negotiations of 11–24 July 2000, held in the United States under the auspices of President Bill Clinton in his last days in office. In these negotiations, the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak, came face-to-face with the president of Palestine, our leader Yasser Arafat, known to us as Abu Ammar, a name used by us that is both familiar and respectful. I shall attempt to demystify the major events of that period, placing them in their historical context on the basis of my own participation and involvement. Many versions have been presented that have little to do with the reality of events as they happened.

Holding the position of prime minister, to which I was appointed by President Arafat in October 2003 after the resignation of my colleague Abu Mazen, was far from being the first phase of my personal and political relationship with Abu Ammar. It would take up many pages and chapters to tell the whole story. I shall begin, however, with the Camp David summit of 2000. Before this event, which was President Clinton's last bid for Middle East peace, many on the Palestinian side had warned that it would not succeed. The reason for failure was that although the Americans were desperate to reach a peace agreement while President Clinton was still in office, this would not be enough.

What would prove to be the insurmountable obstacle was that the Israeli leadership under Ehud Barak was reluctant and unwilling to make the necessary compromises. I was indeed one of the first to warn of this possibility and its detrimental consequences for the Palestinians. At the end of the summit, despite Israel's obvious recalcitrance, President Clinton laid the blame squarely, and in my view inappropriately, on our leader, President Arafat. Clinton alleged that Arafat had failed to seize what had seemed, from the American vantage point at least, to have been a rare and historic opportunity to resolve the Palestinian question in a way that was acceptable to both sides. We, on the other hand, had perceived no magic panacea to be on offer. Nevertheless, Clinton rubbed salt into the wound by speaking of the political courage of the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak, and by lavishing unstinted praise on the supposedly generous offers he had made during the talks.

We found this discouraging, to say the least. We had already observed the bias of the American mediators towards the Israelis, which had given us cause for anxiety and concern. However, in the aftermath of the disappointing summit, we did not expect such a powerful opening volley of criticism as that unleashed by the US President's statement. In the political and media battle that was to ensue, the campaign to belittle our efforts and to deprecate our commitment to peace continued with vehemence. To add to the hostile attitude of the Americans, Israel deluged us with unremitting verbal attacks, claiming that Abu Ammar had wasted what was said to have been a golden opportunity. The more the summit receded into the past, the more the Israelis waxed eloquent about the allegedly wonderful offer they had made us. It seemed to us, as we had feared, that the American President had been keen to achieve a diplomatic success in the Middle East at any cost to conclude his second term in the White House and that his aides and advisors had not adequately prepared the ground for him or explained the potential pitfalls.

As we faced the deluge of hostile media coverage in the aftermath of the summit, which had begun even before we had left the American presidential retreat, we in the Palestinian leadership took up a defensive position. Also before the end of the summit, we had been aware that if the outcome were to be failure, we would be blamed. However, we failed to make our voices heard to rebut these accusations. The truth

is that the Palestinian leadership had not realised what a negative effect a failure at Camp David would have on its image. With great regret, I announced after our return that I intended to withdraw from the negotiating process, as I found myself, sadly, in disagreement with Abu Ammar on certain issues. In general, we found it hard to explain the Palestinian point of view on what had transpired at Camp David, which was that Israel's offer had not been at all generous in terms of our basic demands. In the international media, we offered no coordinated counterblast to the allegations made against us. This was not a deliberate policy on the part of the Palestinian leadership, but was more the result of the fact that we had dispersed to think about the aftermath of the summit rather than preparing and coordinating our response. This was a mistake on our part. In the event, only isolated statements of mitigation by individual members of the Palestinian delegation emerged.

The principal Israeli accusation against us was that Yasser Arafat either did not want to end the current conflict or was unable to do so. It was conjectured that he was unwilling to pay the domestic political price for peace, which would have involved explaining to the Palestinian people that concessions had to be made. It was also supposed that he found it difficult to break free from his belief that Israel would respond better to violence than to diplomacy, and that Israel would be better prepared to make concessions if the campaign of what the Israelis regarded as terrorist acts against them continued. The truth was that Israel had more to gain from violence than we did, and less from negotiation. In due course, this became the basis of Israeli policy. Nevertheless, by accusing Yasser Arafat of being unable to grasp the historic opportunity which had been presented to him at Camp David, the Israelis accused him, in effect, of failing to perceive the real interests of his people, although in reality nothing could have been further from the truth.

For decades, in fact, Israel had claimed that the Palestinian leadership had allowed chances to pass them by. The Israelis had begun to mock us by calling us the 'people of lost opportunities'. Along with this, the Israelis repeatedly insisted that there was no Palestinian partner with whom they could negotiate in what they persistently claimed was their sincere search for peace. Thus, they sought to justify

their assertion that there was no alternative to their use of force and the constant shedding of blood, with the continuation of war until, they hoped, a demoralised Palestinian people would be vanquished by steel and by fire. The chief of staff of the Israeli armed forces, Moshe Ya'alon, gave clear expression to this later, when at the height of the second Intifada, which became known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, he said that the idea of the inevitability of defeat must be burned into the Palestinian consciousness.

On the other hand, it must be said that though President Arafat was vilified by the Israelis and excoriated by the Americans, he was met, on his return to the Palestinian territories from Camp David, by a surge of approval from the Palestinian population. This was gratifying and to some extent assuaged the doubts with which we had begun to be beset. However, it also diverted our attention from the need to rebut the criticism we faced from outside. Public rallies were held in the Palestinian territories to encourage and support the Palestinian leadership in its steadfastness and its adherence to the basic principles of Palestinian independence. This was very welcome to those of us who had formed part of the delegation. I was myself especially gratified by the favourable attention, which I believed we had earned. Before the Camp David summit, in the period preceding our journey to the United States, we had yearned for such popular approval. Instead, at that time, campaigns had been from within, against the Palestinian leadership by those who opposed our plans to seek peace. Others in the Palestinian movement were angry with those of us who went to Camp David because they had not been chosen to participate and they allowed their resentment to take the form of criticism of our mission. We always felt we had done our best in the circumstances. We were, therefore, gratified by the public's warm embrace, as well as by the silence of those Palestinian personalities who had vilified us on the eve of Camp David. The display of public appreciation was reminiscent of the days when the Palestinian leadership in exile had first returned to the historic territory of Palestine. The extent to which it distracted us from making an early response to Israel's unfair accusations was, however, unfortunate.

Of course, the wave of popular approval could not continue indefinitely. As it began to subside, the low profile we had adopted in responding to Israeli and American criticism began to tell against us.

Not only did we pay insufficient attention to the dangers of the ever-increasing accusations against us but, crucially, we also failed to take the opportunity to say what we knew about the Israeli negotiating position at Camp David. We should have emphasised as much as we were able the evasiveness, deviousness, indecision and refusal to face up to the occasion which had characterised Israel's behaviour. Our failure to do so had a bad effect on our image. We lost the initiative and allowed the Israelis to present their version as a true account of what had taken place. As time passed, Israel's claims became deeply entrenched and it became more difficult to expose them as fabrications than it would have been if we had begun at once. We failed to withstand the joint Israeli-American propaganda attack and to expose the campaign against us for what it was: namely a serious attempt to undermine the Palestinian leadership in general and President Yasser Arafat in particular. Ehud Barak had said explicitly that his mission at Camp David was, as he put it, to 'unmask Yasser Arafat', exposing him as a man with a deep-seated reluctance to recognise Israel.

In the event, as international public opinion increasingly accepted the version of events promoted by the Israelis and the Americans as true, the need for us to rise from our slumber and tend to our international image became pressing. We need the world to understand us. We needed to give a Palestinian version of the outcome of Camp David, putting our own viewpoint forward in the international media through making ourselves available for interviews and making well-placed statements. It was not enough to have the approval of the Palestinian public, we also needed to appeal directly to worldwide public opinion, since we would in due course need international support for renewed efforts to achieve a just settlement. Belatedly, then, a Palestinian diplomatic and media campaign got under way, though we had few resources in comparison with the powerful Israeli propaganda machine.

Meanwhile, while their media assault against us continued undiminished, the Israelis lost no time in taking direct action against us in the way they knew best, that of violence. The Israeli military machine wheeled into action once more to undermine the Palestinian Authority (PA), in this instance deliberately attempting to destroy its security infrastructure. By a process of encirclement, sieges and intimidation, with the demolition of houses, offices and

other premises, as well as arrests, and even targeted assassinations, they sought to degrade the status of the Palestinian Authority in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of the Palestinian people. As Israel concentrated its assault on the Palestinian infrastructure and Palestinian security institutions, the presidential headquarters in Gaza were destroyed, followed by the airport and other installations necessary to the Palestinian territory. Every armed attack carried out by militant Palestinian factions opposed to the occupation drew immediate retaliation in the shape of an Israeli military operation against some part of our security apparatus, despite there being no link between the Palestinian security forces and the factions carrying out these attacks. After the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, these militant factions were further stigmatised by being characterised as international terrorist groups. All this strengthened the Palestinian Authority's belief that it had become the target of a campaign intended to justify the Israeli mantra that 'there is no Palestinian partner for peace'. Finally, the Israelis laid siege to the Palestinian presidential headquarters in Ramallah and declared President Arafat to be 'irrelevant'.

It may seem surprising that, despite the failure of Camp David and the atmosphere of hostility, bilateral negotiations quietly continued. Shlomo Ben-Ami and I undertook serious discussions which culminated in the Taba negotiations of January 2001, achieving preliminary results which were more significant than any of the previous talks, including those we had held in Stockholm on the eve of the Camp David summit and the negotiations at Camp David itself in the presence of the prime minister of Israel and the presidents. At Taba we produced a working draft which was later summarised as a potential framework for peace by Miguel Moratinos, the European envoy for the peace process. These talks covered many of the issues scheduled for the permanent settlement negotiations and could have formed an important foundation for negotiations, had the Camp David summit not intervened. With hindsight, Camp David began to look more and more like a hasty response to the desire of the American administration to convene a summit while Clinton was still in office, clutching at the possibility that Clinton might be able to claim a significant move towards Middle East peace as part of

his legacy. Even though Ehud Barak had been unwilling to make the concessions we needed, he also took part in this charade, working on the principle that failure would do him no harm but success could be to his benefit. The result, as we have seen, was nothing more than disappointment and recrimination.

After Camp David, and despite the determination to blame the Palestinians for its failure, it may seem surprising that President Clinton continued to involve himself in the Middle East peace process. Nevertheless, as meetings and communications between us and the Israelis continued through various channels, on 23 December 2000, President Clinton produced a final set of suggestions that came to be known later as the 'Clinton Parameters'. Continuing his efforts to the very end, he received President Arafat at the White House on 2 January 2001. Arafat told him that the Palestinian leadership would agree to all his proposals, which were described by Arafat as constituting the basis of an agreement that the Palestinians would accept. However, the idea of pursuing Clinton's proposals began to lose its momentum as 20 January 2001, the date of the inauguration of the new Republican president, drew closer. Some Arab analysts even believed Bush might be more understanding towards the Palestinian position than his predecessor. There was a mood that we should wait to see what the new president said, rather than continue to place our faith in the outgoing incumbent.

In addition, rather surprisingly, once President Clinton had finally stepped down, both he and his former advisor, Dennis Ross, began once more to sour the atmosphere, beginning again to accuse President Arafat and the Palestinian leadership of causing the negotiations at Camp David to fail. This left a bad taste in our mouths. Meanwhile, the expected change also came in Israel, where the Labour leader, Ehud Barak, had been obliged to resign as prime minister on 10 December 2000 after the withdrawal of a number of smaller parties from his coalition, and he had then called a special election for the position of prime minister. On 6 February 2001 this was to be won, as expected, by the Likud leader, Ariel Sharon.

From 21 to 27 January 2001, after Barak's resignation and before the election of his successor, while Barak's administration was at least technically still in charge, we summoned up the courage to go once more

to the negotiating table in Taba, where Israel was to be represented by Shlomo Ben-Ami and Gilad Sher. These were our final negotiations with what might be thought of as the 'old regime' in Israel. What gave us heart for another attempt was that we knew the personalities of these men and the other officials involved in the existing Israeli negotiating team. We had come to know these men well and judged them to be for the most part sympathetic to the pain of our situation, while we felt they knew enough of our negotiating positions to have a degree of sympathy with our goals. We also knew that this was likely to be the last opportunity we would have to talk to them. Our fear, justified by events, was that they would not survive the upheaval in Israel that would follow the impending election, where the extreme right wing seemed likely to win, with its history of antipathy towards peace. This influenced us to go on trying with the Israeli officials we knew right up to the last available moment, in the hope of salvaging whatever might be possible from previous failed negotiations. We did see some of them again later as aides to Shimon Peres.

We often wondered about Barak's motivation in permitting what we came to think of as the 'last minute' negotiations at Taba. The true nature of his position only became clear two years later, on 17 October 2002, when Shlomo Ben-Ami wrote an article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* summing up the internal debate among the Israeli negotiators. Ben-Ami wrote,

there was a pistol on the table. The elections were a month away and there was a minister [Shimon Peres], who told Ehud [Barak] that if he didn't go to Taba they – the government and the Labour Party – would denounce him in public for evading his duty to make peace. He therefore had no choice but to go to a meeting for something he himself no longer believed in.

Abu Ammar insisted that I should lead our delegation to Taba, despite my having announced my withdrawal from the negotiating process after Camp David. He said he wished to show he was in earnest regarding this new initiative, and he knew I was regarded by the Israelis and the Americans as a serious negotiator. In order to avoid misunderstanding, I asked him in advance to define my remit and to state explicitly what he would be prepared to agree to and whether he would be prepared to

use his authority to justify any agreement before Palestinian and Arab public opinion if we were to reach positive results. In answer to all my questions, he simply said 'Go and negotiate. Whatever you and the negotiating team can accept, I will endorse, accept and defend. Trust in God, and do not hesitate.' With such an unconditional mandate from the head of the Palestinian leadership, unencumbered by hidden obstacles, I was confident of my ability to represent the Palestinian side when I arrived in Taba. Another advantage in Taba was that our delegation had been carefully selected to exclude those who might see themselves as being in competition to be the delegation's head instead of myself, thus ensuring that the differences of opinion that had sometimes manifested themselves within previous Palestinian delegations did not arise. We arrived in Taba on 20 January 2001.

When the talks in Taba were over, a final statement was drafted that read as follows, but was never issued:

The Israeli and Palestinian delegations have carried out serious talks in depth over the past six days in order to reach a permanent and comprehensive agreement between the two sides. These talks have been unprecedented in their positive atmosphere and the expression of a mutual desire to fulfil the national, security and existential needs of each side [...] Both sides declare that they have never been closer to reaching an agreement than they now are; therefore they agree that they believe that the remaining gaps can be bridged by resuming the negotiations after the Israeli elections [...] The negotiating teams have discussed four main topics – refugees, security, borders and Jerusalem – with the aim of reaching a permanent agreement which will guarantee peace for both their peoples. Both sides have taken into account the proposals made by President Clinton. There was a genuine advance on all these issues in terms of each side understanding the positions of the other side and the positions of both sides have become closer to one another.

What is important in this brief summary is its optimism. We immediately began to think about holding a meeting while there was still time between President Arafat and Ehud Barak in Stockholm, where the Swedish government had expressed its willingness to host an early bilateral summit. Extensive preliminary meetings were swiftly held, but this bilateral summit never came to pass. This brought to an end the lengthy history of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in

Ehud Barak's time as prime minister of Israel. It had been a time when high hopes had mingled with great disappointments. In the next phase, from 2001 to 2005, Ariel Sharon was in power in Israel as the leader of the right-wing Likud party. The detail of this period will be the central focus of this book, the third part of my account of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

1

THE SECOND INTIFADA How it Began

On 28 September 2000, while Ariel Sharon was still the leader of the Likud opposition in Israel, he made his unwanted and intrusive visit to the courtyard surrounding the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. This is the holy place known to Palestinians and Muslims around the world as the Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary). Sharon's act initiated a sequence of events in Palestine that soon became known as the 'al-Aqsa Intifada'. This was the moment when nationalist and religious concerns first began to intermingle within the Palestinian movement, and when the Islamic factions started to play an increasingly prominent role.

The Palestinian leadership sought to prevent Sharon's visit taking place. We made contact with the Israeli government as well as with the Americans to ask them to urge Sharon to abandon his plan. There was, however, no response to our approaches. Ehud Barak's reply was that he had no power to prevent the leader of the opposition from undertaking a visit which the Israeli security forces had approved. More ominously, he said that he saw no reason to stop it. The Palestinian leadership requested the heads of the Palestinian security forces to contact their Israeli counterparts to warn them of the potential consequences of Sharon's proposed act.

A week before the planned date of Sharon's visit, President Arafat, at the head of a Palestinian delegation including myself and Abu Mazen, the name we familiarly give to our colleague Mahmoud Abbas,

went to speak to Ehud Barak at his house in Kokhaf Ya'eer. This was a meeting arranged by Daniel Abraham, an American billionaire and philanthropist who supported the Democratic Party in the United States and was a promoter of the Middle East peace process, to discuss the potential for negotiations and the problems involved. The encounter gave us a further opportunity to urge Barak to prevent the visit. Abu Ammar asked Barak why Sharon had not apparently wished to make such a visit at an earlier time when he had been in government and held ministerial office. Barak replied once more that in Israel's democracy people are free to do as they wish and he could not prevent the leader of the opposition from visiting the Haram complex. We understood then that our efforts to stop Sharon would not be successful. In addition, popular Palestinian reaction seemed likely to be even more profound than had previously been expected. At the time, it was not yet clear whether or not Sharon intended to enter the mosque itself. If he were to do so, the reaction would be yet more powerful.

When 28 September 2000 came, Sharon's entourage included a number of members of the opposition. Senior security officials, on the pretext of maintaining order, headed a force of around 1,500 policemen, border guards and secret service members. In the event, Sharon's visit lasted only half an hour. He was asked by the Israeli police chief to refrain from entering the colonnade fronting the al-Aqsa Mosque and he agreed not to do so. By the entrance to the Haram, 1,500 Palestinian citizens gathered and were held back by the police; they chanted hostile slogans and threw stones which failed to reach Sharon's group. In the scuffles on this first day, some 50 Palestinians were hurt. The following day, however, after Friday prayers, there was a further demonstration that brought scenes of violence and widespread clashes throughout the Old City and the surrounding areas. In the end, some seven Palestinians were killed and a hundred were wounded. On the Israeli side, around 15 policemen and border guards suffered injuries.

The Israeli violence was displayed to the Palestinian public in television news broadcasts, which raised the pitch of popular anger further and led to more violent incidents involving the Palestinian public. People gained the impression that this was a deliberate act

on the part of the Israelis to ignite an already highly volatile situation in order to undermine the conditions for future negotiations by enraging the Palestinian public. The Israeli authorities, on the other hand, insisted that the reaction to Sharon's visit was disproportionate, insinuating that it had been organised by Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian leadership as a response to Barak's inflexibility at Camp David, with the intention of putting pressure on Barak to offer additional compromises.

Meanwhile, as events developed on the ground, it was certainly true that given the public fury the Palestinian leadership had little freedom of action. As Israel ratcheted up the level of force used against Palestinian civilians, our calls for calm fell on deaf ears. On our side, voices of moderation failed to make themselves heard and the Palestinian leadership was unable to control the explosive situation. Nevertheless, we continued to call for a ceasefire. The Palestinian security forces were warned not to respond in kind if the Israeli forces opened fire. The Palestinian leadership was keenly aware of the dangers of slipping into the abyss of an unequal military confrontation. We were highly conscious of the dangers of militarising the Intifada, and we knew we had to be careful not to give the impression that a conflict was brewing in which the Palestinians would appear to be playing the role of aggressors, which would allow the real aggressors, the Israelis, to present themselves as victims fighting only in their own defence.

Wide-scale armed conflict seemed nevertheless to be coming closer, as the confrontations and bloody clashes spread throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, many covered live on air on television as the original incidents had been, with the effect of stoking up emotions to an even higher level. In the Palestinian leadership we instructed our security chiefs to stay in contact with their Israeli counterparts, urging the Israelis to maintain self-control and moderation by asking them, for example, to stop provocative actions such as the deployment of Israeli tanks at checkpoints and at locations inside cities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The leadership also asked the Palestinian security forces to position their own men to head off clashes at Israeli checkpoints, particularly at the Netzarim Junction in the Gaza Strip. This was later to become a

permanent scene of battle and was renamed the Martyrs' Crossroads due to the high number of civilians who would fall victim there to the violence in the coming days, many of them children. One early incident that had explosive consequences was the martyrdom of a child, Muhammad al-Durra, in his father's arms on 30 September 2000. His father had tried in vain to take shelter and use his body to protect his son from gunfire from an Israeli guard post close by. The event was recorded by a cameraman working for French television and the tragic sequence of images spread like wildfire across the Arab and international television networks.

The killing of Muhammad al-Durra, for which the Israeli army refused to accept responsibility, was a decisive incident in the events of the second Intifada. Instead of leading to more moderate behaviour on the part of the Israelis, it seemed to serve only to intensify the situation, with the loss of more civilian Palestinian lives. The number of martyrs during the first month after the death of Muhammad al-Durra was between five or six a day, many of them children and young men, while only twelve Israelis died that month. Perhaps the most significant consequences of the boy's death were not its reverberations abroad, important though these were, but the scenes of protest seen in Arab towns and villages within Israel, inside the Green Line. On 1 October 2000 there was a wave of popular demonstrations by Palestinians living inside Israel, larger even than that which was customary on Land Day, with protests spreading from Galilee and the Triangle all the way to the Negev. The cities affected included Nazareth, Jaffa, Acre and Lydda, as well as many other Arab towns and villages. These protests were violently repressed by the Israeli security forces, leading to the deaths of 13 Palestinians and the wounding of dozens of victims.

While all this was happening, political contacts were made at various levels abroad. The most significant of these was the swiftly arranged summit meeting that was held in Paris from 4 October 2000 under the auspices of the French president, Jacques Chirac, and attended by President Arafat, Ehud Barak and Madeleine Albright, the American secretary of state. One session was held at the Élysée Palace, the residence of the French president, and another at the American embassy in Paris. The discussions centred on the need for

an immediate cessation of violence and the restoration of calm. The meetings broke up in an atmosphere of recrimination on 7 October. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the Americans, a nine-clause statement was drafted, the most important provision of which was an immediate halt to violence on both sides. President Jacques Chirac, however, felt the statement was inadequate because it did not provide for the formation of an international commission of investigation, as he had proposed, so the document was not issued under the auspices of France after the Paris meeting. The Palestinian leadership proposed that it could be signed at a further meeting that we suggested could be held immediately in Sharm el-Sheikh. When contacted, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt backed this idea. The statement was never issued, in the event, because Ehud Barak refused to accept President Mubarak's invitation to come to Egypt.

A further incident that exacerbated the situation took place in the Palestinian territories, this time in Nablus. After the deaths of several Palestinians at the hands of Israeli settlers, a group of Palestinian men from the town and the neighbouring refugee camps surrounded a location known as Joseph's Tomb. This had been a mosque, but the settlers had claimed it as a site sacred to the Jews and transformed it into a religious school under Israeli army protection. This gathering became a massive Palestinian demonstration which forced the settlers to withdraw from the site. In due course, the Israelis sent reinforcements to seize the premises back. The issue was a complicated one for the Israelis. The Israeli army inclined towards relinquishing the site, which they saw as more trouble than it was worth, while the settlers were extremely stubborn in their determination to hold on to it. Ehud Barak was apprehensive of the political and moral repercussions for him in terms of internal politics of being seen to evacuate the site under popular pressure from the Palestinian side. Abu Ammar ordered the Palestinian security services to intervene, by force if necessary, to prevent the situation from escalating even further. However, the massive popular demonstration still surrounding Joseph's Tomb was too much for the Palestinian security forces, which were unable to take control. In the end, on 7 October 2000, this led to the Israeli occupation forces finally withdrawing from the location. Barak saw this as damaging

to the image of the Israeli army and thereafter took action with less hesitation in such confrontations.

The Palestinian leadership, for its part, was strongly aware that if armed militants were to join the ranks of the demonstrators, the use of weapons in civilian areas would rob the Intifada of its original character as a popular movement. Instead, there would be armed clashes between the two sides and unequal gun battles between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian militants of a kind in which the Israeli occupation forces were highly versed. This would play into Israel's hands, in contrast to the first Intifada, in which the rejection of the use of force had preserved its integrity as a movement of peaceful struggle. We were adamant that the second Intifada should not become militarised, but should remain a broad-based and peaceful protest movement against the Israeli occupation. Anything else could obstruct the possibility of a return to the peace process. However, as time passed, events inexorably took a more violent turn and Israel's military response became more severe. Internal rivalries within the Palestinian movement did not help, with various factions tending to deliberately escalate events in order to claim leadership of the Intifada.

The options available to the Palestinian leadership became ever more limited. As armed factions competed to take control of the Intifada, the Israelis matched the escalation in the level of Palestinian activity with tougher tactics, giving its army the green light by adopting what it called the power of deterrence in order to reaffirm the image it sought to project of itself as a force that was never the loser in any confrontation. Israel began to use its air force to destroy empty Palestinian installations. The military then sent helicopters and armoured forces into civilian areas. The soldiers reacted to any gunfire by Palestinian factions with massive firepower. Many Palestinians were wounded and the number of martyrs grew. This in turn led to further demonstrations accompanying the funerals of the dead, which would then lead to further escalation. The Israeli army claimed that its policy was one of measured reaction tempered by self-control. However, the growing number of martyrs among Palestinian civilians, and especially among children, demonstrated that the reality was otherwise. In Gaza, the Israeli level of violence escalated from one day to the next.

The growth in the numbers of civilian deaths undermined the position of the Palestinian leadership. It was the central issue in every contact with the Israeli side, at any level of responsibility. A week after the outbreak of the second Intifada, Fatah in Gaza issued a statement in which it called on the inhabitants to exercise calm and to preserve order. Fatah and Hamas organised a joint demonstration to try to establish control of the situation. Nevertheless, as more Palestinians were martyred and wounded every day, without the Israelis suffering comparable casualties, mourners at the funerals of Palestinians began to call for a response, demanding revenge for the growing numbers of deaths of women, children and non-combatant older men. On 12 October, around two weeks after the start of the Intifada, an unplanned incident took place that poured more fuel on the flames. This was the apprehension in Ramallah of two Israeli *mistaravim* soldiers, undercover agents posing as Arabs, whom the Israelis claimed were unarmed reservists. The two captives were taken to the police station at al-Bireh, which was soon surrounded by huge crowds of demonstrators demanding that the two be handed over to them. The mob finally broke into the police station by force and killed the two soldiers. The incident was aggravated by live news reports from the scene on television which included images of the bodies of the two soldiers being thrown from the building into the courtyard below.

This incident, strongly condemned by the Palestinian leadership, was another turning point in the Intifada. Israel was also roused to a state of turmoil and promised revenge and retaliation. At the Palestinian security headquarters in Bituniya, west of Ramallah, Abu Mazen and I held an emergency meeting with Colonel Jibreel Rajjoub, our head of preventive security, together with a number of high-ranking Palestinian security officials from various other agencies based in the West Bank. We strongly condemned the incident and undertook to halt the disturbances with the deployment of Palestinian police to prevent friction between the population and the Israeli army, which was by now blockading all the West Bank cities with tanks.

We agreed that Colonel Jibreel Rajjoub would speak directly to his Israeli counterparts, who were in turn in direct contact with the

Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak. The initial reply from the Israeli side was that Israel wanted action not statements. Though the Israeli army high command advised restraint, Barak, who was seething with anger, did not agree. We later heard that he had banged his fist on the table, saying, 'We are in the Middle East, not Switzerland. We will make them pay a high price this time. We will bomb them from Jenin to Jabaliya.' When the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, made a telephone call to Barak to calm the situation, the Israeli prime minister reportedly replied: 'The images of the incident that are in the public domain cannot be endured by any nation or human being.' He issued orders that individuals known to have been involved in the incident were to be pursued and targeted, and he also ordered helicopters to bomb a number of Palestinian targets, including the police station at al-Bireh, premises associated with the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, and a ship of the Palestinian navy in Gaza, which was indeed sunk.

Though Israel gave the Palestinian Authority advance warning of the targets it intended to bomb in order to limit casualties, the attack on Ramallah from the air did not bode well. We halted the police deployment we had promised so that we would not appear to be acting under pressure from Israel. Security contact continued, however, both at the headquarters of preventive security in the West Bank and at the Liaison and Engagement headquarters at the Erez checkpoint in the Gaza Strip, with the intervention of representatives from the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who were in contact with both sides.

The Americans renewed their efforts at mediation, with a new summit convened as a matter of emergency in Sharm el-Sheikh on 16 October 2000. This time, Ehud Barak conceded that he would go to Egypt. The meeting was also attended by President Clinton, President Mubarak, the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, and King Abdullah II of Jordan, in addition to President Arafat. The venue overlooked the Sharm el-Sheikh resort. I was a member of the Palestinian delegation, together with Abu Mazen, Yasser Abed Rabbo, Dr Saeb Erakat, Muhammad Dahlan and other less senior Palestinian officials. The diplomatic outcome of this summit will be discussed later.

From that meeting, however, I clearly recall a personal incident. The reason I attended was because President Clinton had specifically asked President Arafat to include me. When President Clinton saw me, he seemed determined to single me out and engage me in conversation. I was surprised, but felt he wanted to make up for the difference of opinion that had occurred between us as the Camp David summit had drawn to a close, when he had accused me of being personally responsible for the failure of those negotiations. On this occasion, as President Clinton took what appeared to be particular care to be courteous towards me and to pay me special attention, those present listened attentively and with some surprise. He asked after my family and mentioned once more my youngest sister, Zainab, who had been only six years old when we had been at Camp David. President Clinton had found it very remarkable that I had such a young sister and had teased me about it with some light-hearted remarks. He was more affable towards me than to others, taking me by the arm and walking with me a few steps away from the group. He expressed his admiration for the beauty of Sharm el-Sheikh and said it was important for the Egyptians to ensure that it was developed. When we got down to business, the understanding reached at Sharm el-Sheikh was that a statement would be issued by President Arafat and the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak, in which both would commit themselves to desist from further violent acts.

President Clinton was by this time in the final days of his second term. Nevertheless, his belated success at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit not only brought about a ceasefire but later led to the appointment of the international commission headed by George Mitchell, a former US senator. The remit of this commission was to investigate the circumstances that had led to the clashes and to make practical recommendations for steps to be taken to prevent further friction on the ground. The ceasefire, however, lasted only two days before it was broken by extremist Israeli settlers near Nablus. This led to renewed clashes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and opened the door for a new wave of violent confrontations.

Two matters were of particular note during the early days of the second Intifada. These were first the intensified bitterness between

the two sides. The Palestinian public reached a new level of hatred for the Israelis as they were shocked by the excessive number of deaths and the lack of restraint of the Israeli army in opening fire on demonstrators, even when they included children. The second noteworthy development was the inability of not only the protagonists themselves but also of such potential mediators as the Americans, the French, the Egyptians and others to offer political solutions that went to the heart of the crisis that had led to the outbreak of the second Intifada two months before. Proposals offered were all limited to short-term plans of a technical and procedural nature. None of the schemes contained any serious attempt to suggest any political initiative to deal with the root cause of the problem and not just its symptoms. It was at this time that the Israelis ceased to talk of finding a 'partner' for peace, tending instead to say that 'there is no one we can talk to; no one we can trust'. Meanwhile, after so much blood had been shed, the Palestinian street began to ask whether the Intifada could now end without having achieved anything, and if it was possible to return to the previous situation as if nothing had happened, after we had seen such terrible sights in our own streets and villages.

With hindsight, the end of the first month of the second Intifada was a major turning point. On 27 October 2000, as Friday worshippers finished their prayers in a village south of Nablus called Kafr Qalil, a demonstration began in which most of the participants were Fatah supporters rather than hard-line militants. When the people reached the southern entrance to the city of Nablus, they found themselves face-to-face with an armoured Israeli military force. Soon they were subjected to a hail of bullets. The Israelis claimed that Palestinian gunmen had opened fire from behind the demonstrators. The upshot was that five Fatah officials were killed and many others were wounded. The reactions in Nablus, as well as in other towns in the West Bank and Gaza, were of extreme anger. The way was open for the onset of a new phase in the protests in which mainstream Fatah supporters felt ever more angry, and the atmosphere was created for the first bombing inside the Green Line, though this was a car bomb and not a suicide bombing like those that would soon follow.

Despite everything, the desire of most members of the Palestinian leadership was still to halt the clashes, although armed confrontations were becoming ever more prominent as part of the Intifada, and they wished to prevent further casualties among the protesters, whose anger intensified with every death. In the first instance, we hoped to stop the violence, but we also wanted to maintain the possibility of returning to the peace process and to reopen negotiating channels with the Israeli government. We hoped that the Intifada could reassume the character of a peaceful protest, like the first Intifada. For this reason, when Abu Mazen and I went to see Abu Ammar at his headquarters in Gaza, we both called for intensified efforts to disarm the protests and end the violence. We felt that the Intifada had already delivered its message and that its voice had been heard throughout the world. Abu Mazen backed me when I forcefully put the case for a cessation of armed confrontations, which were being exploited not only by Israel but also by Palestinian opposition factions who were determined to bring about the failure of the Palestinian Authority, hoping always to supplant it. Abu Ammar, however, though he listened to the argument, did not respond.

Abu Ammar's silence was not surprising to me in the least. It was his manner. There had been many instances in the past when, faced by the need to make a decision, he simply listened to the discussion, making no comment, leaving others to come to whatever conclusion suited them as they interpreted his silence in their own way. Members of the Palestinian leadership would then leave Abu Ammar's office each convinced in his own different way of our leader's wisdom. Abu Ammar, we knew, was the one among us who would stay up at night monitoring developments, the one who was most dedicated to the cause. We respected his wisdom: he was the guardian of our dream and the one who had personally experienced all the many crises in the long history of the Palestinian national struggle. It was for each of us to interpret his position in our own way. On this occasion, in my opinion, Abu Ammar had a complicated equation to solve. He was torn between opposing and incompatible possibilities, relating both to the immediate situation and longer-term outcomes. He was aware of the need to balance the Palestinian factions against each other, including those who opposed the Palestinian Authority, and not to lose control

of them, while at the same time he had to take account of the dangers of Israel's continuing oppression and the longer-term requirements of the peace process.

I write this clarification so that Abu Ammar's silence on this occasion will not be understood either as weakness or as a desire on his part for the violent confrontations to continue, as has been suggested in Israeli circles. I must also add that the difficult position in which the Palestinian leadership found itself at the time was the result of the recent negative developments, especially after the failure of Camp David and the thwarting of our hopes that had been raised by the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. After a month of the second Intifada, the situation was so complex that the outcome of any decision had become incalculable. What most occupied Abu Ammar's mind at the time, and what I believe drove him to maintain his silence, was that the Intifada appeared to have ceased to be a popular protest movement and to have become a series of armed clashes in a way that no one in the Palestinian leadership would have chosen. At the same time, he was conscious of being the leader of the entire Palestinian movement, and not just of Fatah, and was anxious not to alienate any group.

However, our strategy was not Abu Ammar's sole concern. Another alarming aspect of the situation loomed on the horizon of Palestinian-Israeli relations. This was the sudden, real escalation in the level of military aggression brought to bear by Israel. The use of military jets and helicopters by Israel against various Palestinian installations was a new and highly significant development militating against our attempts since 1993 to build the relationship between our two nations on a foundation of dialogue and negotiations, rather than on force. Abu Ammar realised, perhaps more than anyone else, the potential dangers. The significance for a Palestinian Authority that had not yet fully achieved independence and the liberation of its territory, or indeed the construction of its own institutions, was ominous. Abu Ammar was keenly aware, amongst other considerations, of the need for steadfastness and the importance of not being seen to yield. For this reason, I believe he felt that the Intifada should be allowed to continue, however it was being waged, as it was a means to bring about diplomatic pressure from the international community against Israel.

and its belligerence. The contrary consideration was that the slide into violent and bloody practices played into Israel's hands, because Israel's heavily armed military and security forces are accustomed to oppression and iron-fist policies.

I recall, at a later date, after Ariel Sharon had replaced Ehud Barak as prime minister, that I had a highly confidential meeting with Abu Ammar and Faisal Husseini. We discussed at length Sharon's emphasis on security as a priority, before any other consideration, together with its dangers and the need for us not to be swept along by this Israeli strategy. We discussed how to counter the violation of Palestinian territorial and human rights that was implicit in the security proposals put forward by Sharon, who did not shrink from the infliction of disproportionate suffering on the Palestinian people with the excuse of ensuring security for the Israelis at any price. Both Faisal and I argued that the rules of the game must be changed and that we must reject Sharon's security plans, demanding instead a return to the prioritisation of negotiations and the renewal of the search for peace. Abu Ammar's opinion agreed with ours.

Meanwhile, Hamas entered the scene. The drift of the second Intifada towards violence and armed conflict presented a great opportunity to the militant Palestinian opposition in general, but in particular for the new Islamic opposition represented by Hamas. They were able to foster and profit from the prevailing mood of despair and disappointment among the Palestinians. Hamas seized the opportunity of the popular protests to renew its activities after a retreat which had lasted around three years. During this time, a large number of leading Hamas figures in the field had been either arrested or assassinated. These included such men as Yahya Ayyash, Mahmoud Abu Hanoud, Salah Shehadeh, Muhyiddin Al-Sharif and the brothers Adel and Imad Awadallah. The Hamas leadership was also targeted, including, for example, Muhammad Dayf, and other notable figures in the movement.

During their three-year fallow period, Hamas had failed to find a receptive audience among the Palestinians owing to the continuation of the peace process, on which the Palestinian people had pinned their hopes. Now, however, in the atmosphere of violence, the Islamic opposition saw a great opportunity. The siege and bombardment of

the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority gave a boost to Hamas, together with the popular disillusion that resulted from the way Ehud Barak reneged on all the undertakings and promises he had made in better days. Every weakness displayed by the Palestinian Authority conducted to the further rise of the Islamic opposition. In the Palestinian leadership, we began to receive intelligence about the increasing extent to which arms were being smuggled to Hamas and other opposition factions. This served as an early warning and indicated the direction that the escalating violence might take.

At the same time, the competing voices of the militant Palestinian political factions began to talk about making preparations for a battle for Jerusalem, or even for a battle for the liberation and independence of the entirety of the Palestinian territories. In contrast, Israeli figures from both sides of the political spectrum began to speak of their disappointment with the Palestinian Authority. Certain Israelis returned to the theory that the armed confrontations of the second Intifada were the result of a deliberate decision taken by the Palestinian leadership after the failure of Camp David, and that President Arafat himself was the key figure behind them. Their claim was that he was disillusioned with the Fatah old guard and had begun to place his faith in the young leaders of the Palestinian factions. Some even said he was acting in coordination with Hamas. Their argument was that Arafat had come to believe that the Israeli occupation could be ousted by force, especially after the example of Hezbollah's successful expulsion of the Israelis from southern Lebanon. Some even said that President Arafat had come to see himself as a new Arab liberator, the Saladin of his era, and that he had never truly believed in the right of Israel to exist.

When we heard these Israeli claims, which were of course untrue, we began to understand that even if the Israelis sometimes still paid lip service to the aim of restoring calm, the goal on which the various Arab and foreign mediators had all insisted, they were not being honest. This was not because the Palestinian leadership lacked the desire or the will to restore calm, but because Israel was now acting out its own plan. The Israeli military escalation was in fact intended to re-establish the image of the invincible Israeli army after what had been in the end a rather ignominious flight from southern Lebanon, when in

their haste they had left equipment and supplies behind that then fell into the hands of Hezbollah. This had been a terrible humiliation for the Israeli high command. The disturbances in the Palestinian areas seemed a good opportunity to assuage those feelings of shame and to restore the army's pride. This psychological factor was never explicitly discussed during the efforts to impose calm and a ceasefire. However, I believe it was a primary reason why the situation was not at that time brought under control. The persistent Israeli propaganda about what had happened at Camp David served as a justification for Israel's excessive use of force. The Israelis repeated over and over that Yasser Arafat was not committed to peace and that he allegedly rejected Israel's right to exist, and they claimed that there was no partner on the Palestinian side with whom peace could be discussed. On this basis, the justification of violence was easy.

In addition, Israeli internal politics were a further destabilising factor. We observed that Barak was losing his grip on his coalition government, that his standing within his own Labour Party was beginning to be questioned, and that he was progressively failing to maintain his broader popularity among the Israeli people. Having previously promised that he would leave no stone unturned on the road to peace with the Palestinians, we found we now faced a prime minister with his back against the wall who had become increasingly heavy-handed and reverted more and more to his background as a member of Israel's military leadership with a reputation for toughness. This was directly reflected in his instruction to the army that they must at all costs be seen to be victorious in every confrontation with Palestinian protesters. In due course, Barak began to accuse President Arafat of having prepared the current disturbances even before Camp David as a contingency plan to cover himself against any possible failure of negotiations at the tripartite summit.

In a new development on our side, which was to be seen in various parts of the Palestinian territory during these early stages of the second Intifada, new groups of activists began to appear, made up of young men mainly in their twenties who felt strongly about the need to take revenge on the arrogant occupation forces who did not hesitate to boast that they had not suffered any significant casualties in the unbalanced confrontations between stones and machine guns that

were taking place virtually every day. Paradoxically, these activists, who first organised themselves locally in different regions and cities of the West Bank and later began to coordinate with each other, had for the most part emerged from Fatah itself, rather than from the militant factions, though Fatah continued to insist at the level of its leadership that negotiations were the only way towards peace and to distance itself from involvement in armed clashes. This was no doubt why these groups, rather than openly declaring their affiliation to Fatah, began to call themselves the 'al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades' rather than describing themselves as a Fatah militia, or the 'Fatah Shabiba,' or any similar name that would indicate their factional loyalty. This practice particularly began after the Israeli occupation forces killed the martyr Doctor Thabit Thabit, a Fatah representative in the area of Tulkarem. The name 'al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades' also began to gain wide currency in the Gaza Strip.

These new groups were self-sufficient and did not require much in the way of financial support. They grew stronger with every new Israeli intervention in the West Bank and gained in popularity in parallel with the spread of roadblocks and military checkpoints. Over time, they began to operate independently from Fatah, though without reaching the point of insurgency against Fatah's central leadership. Though many inside Fatah had reservations about their methods, the Palestinian leadership concluded that these groups provided a useful outlet for some of the feelings of despair that were increasingly prevalent among Fatah's rank and file members. We felt that any attempt to stem this movement would leave the leadership looking isolated from the street. By letting it be known that it did not take a stand against these groups, the Fatah leadership was able to maintain some degree of control and regain respect. Its continuing influence over the majority of these groups was later to prove to be very useful in enabling Fatah to demonstrate its continuing commitment to struggle at a time when Hamas had begun to claim to be the driving force behind the Intifada.

Meanwhile, for its part, the revitalised Hamas movement had made a cautious beginning. It refrained from taking a central part in the Intifada in the first few weeks, since Fatah had evidently taken the lead and was directing non-violent activities. Hamas did not wish

to appear to be supporting the position of the Palestinian Authority. The Hamas leadership may even have shared the Israeli belief that the Intifada was a stratagem that the Palestinian Authority was using to improve its negotiating position after the failure of Camp David. The Islamic resistance movement assumed that once the Palestinians had returned to the negotiating table, the Intifada would not continue. In order not to appear to be associated with Fatah in such a plan, Hamas banned its military wing, the Izzeddine al-Qassam Brigades, from carrying weapons in public and from all involvement in armed clashes. It invented a new name for its armed units, the Omar al-Mukhtar Brigades, employing the name of another freedom fighter of the 1930s to distance itself from the accusation of carrying out military operations in support of the Palestinian Authority.

As the Intifada went on, however, Hamas slowly began to involve itself in confrontations. The aim of the Hamas leadership was twofold. First, they needed to respond to popular sentiment, which meant that, just as Fatah was already doing, they needed to support the popular uprising. Their second goal, having decided that the Palestinian Authority had not contrived the whole exercise, was to challenge Fatah for the backing of the street. What was striking was the relatively late entry of Hamas into the second Intifada. It was several months before Hamas took the decision to commit itself. When it came in, it took the same route that it had done in 1996, that of suicide bombings, which the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades had not so far embarked upon. In January 2001, Hamas undertook its first operation of this kind. One of its members, a student from al-Najah University in Nablus, blew himself up in the city centre of Netanya inside the Green Line, wounding 30 Israelis. This opened the door for other similar attacks within Israel. It must be admitted that to see Palestinians striking back gave new heart to the Palestinian population, whose morale had been destroyed by the deaths of so many Palestinian civilians and the state of siege to which they were subjected. Soon, the green flags of Hamas began to be seen at demonstrations. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, in contrast, continued to refrain from attacks inside Israel, continuing for at least a year to concentrate on the Israeli occupying forces and the settlers in the Palestinian territories.

The participation of Hamas in the second Intifada complicated still further the position of Fatah and the Palestinian Authority,

especially as the Hamas attacks were causing great losses on the Israeli side, gratifying the desire for revenge felt by the broader Palestinian population, which continued to suffer every day at the hands of the Israelis. On the other hand, the Fatah leadership saw that these suicide operations were depriving the Intifada of its original source of power, namely the Palestinian population itself. In place of unarmed protests by the people as a whole, there were now armed operations by small organised groups. This began to make it appear as if the Palestinian side was deliberately waging war and attacking Israel in a way that allowed the Israelis, just as we had feared they would, to claim that they were fighting in self-defence against an enemy that challenged Israel's very existence. This traduced the reality of the situation, which was in truth that the Palestinians were, as always, the victims.

For all these various reasons, all our efforts to continue the peace process and persuade the Israelis to return to the negotiating table were shattered by the new situation in the Palestinian territories. On the one hand, Israel, as I have pointed out, was keen to cleanse its image after its humiliating defeat in Lebanon, while, on the other hand, the various forces and factions of the Palestinian opposition found in the second Intifada an opportunity that could not be ignored to achieve their different aims. Foremost among these, of course, was to inflict damage on Israel. It must be said that some also sought to undermine the Palestinian Authority, for a variety of reasons. Thus, the option of peace negotiations was steadily eroded both by Hamas and by the secular militant factions.

In this highly charged atmosphere, Israel's rhetoric against the Palestinian leadership went beyond the stage at which Ehud Barak and his aides had spoken of the lack of a Palestinian partner for peace, and reached a new level where Israeli politicians and generals began to speak of their overall lack of trust in the Palestinian leadership and of their unwillingness to accept that our declared positions were genuine or indeed had ever been so. They sowed doubt about the very feasibility of ever reaching a negotiated solution. They were also insistent in accusing Yasser Arafat of being both the architect of the violent clashes and the financial backer of the Palestinian armed factions. There was a new mood in Israel which completely failed

to recognise the anger, despair, depression and disappointment that had overwhelmed the Palestinian people after Camp David. Within Israel, the extremists among the Israeli army commanders and the security services began to take charge. They claimed that Yasser Arafat had no intention of ever making peace with Israel and that he was planning to establish a Palestinian state without attempting to resolve the differences that underlay the historical conflict between our two peoples. They claimed that he had a plan progressively to destroy the state of Israel and that he would never sign a comprehensive and final peace agreement.

Israel's political elite soon began to fall in line with this new attitude, and the confrontation between themselves and the Palestinians was conducted as if peace was henceforth impossible. Without peace as a goal, all that seemed to be left was to ensure security. Moreover, after the Likud party gained power in Israel under the leadership of Ariel Sharon, these ideas enjoyed ever wider acceptance. The new theory was openly espoused by Sharon and his government, as well as by the army and the security services. Sharon soon put into practice what he called the 'war on terror', whereby he sought to destroy the Palestinian Authority and to deny the political reality of its existence, thus justifying a total refusal to cooperate with it.

Before moving on to examine the subsequent phases of the Intifada, which was to last for several years, it should be recalled that before Ariel Sharon took over, despite the oppressive atmosphere that prevailed during the second Intifada, there had still been a small margin for political manoeuvre. A slim chance remained of achieving some positive result through negotiations with Ehud Barak's government in the few remaining weeks of its life. Internal developments in Israel had all pointed towards early elections which Barak would lose, and there had been no doubt that his successor would be Sharon, the 'godfather' of the settlers, and a man with a long, violent history of conflict against the Palestinian people. There was therefore little time to lose.

Between the outbreak of the Intifada and the Knesset elections in February 2001, there was a period of nearly five months during which Ehud Barak was prime minister and when diplomatic efforts and government endeavours continued. Not only did we try to implement

a ceasefire and return to the situation as it had stood on the eve of 28 October 2000, but we also sought to resume the negotiations and attempted to move towards an agreement that would rectify the failures of the Camp David negotiations.

It was during these few months that President Clinton took his final opportunity to propose measures for achieving a comprehensive peace. The serious and wide-ranging talks at Taba took place, which came to be known as the 'last chance negotiations'. I have already given an account of these developments in an earlier book which formed the second part of my history of the peace process.

2

THE SECOND INTIFADA Political Manoeuvres

The opening days of the second Intifada in September 2000, which coincided with Ehud Barak's last days as prime minister in Israel, were, it must be admitted, something of which the Palestinian leadership was able to make use. Though we did not instigate the uprising, we attempted to influence the direction of the protests and confrontations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The dangers inherent in excessive violence and the brutal Israeli repression it would provoke had not yet become apparent, though they soon did. At first we used the Intifada to focus Arab and international interest on the Palestinian cause, which, after the failure of the Camp David negotiations, we wished to place once more in the public eye. Millions of Arabs and Muslims watched the daily scenes of heated clashes that were broadcast live to the world, and the Palestinian issue regained prominence.

Arab satellite television gave the second Intifada something the first Intifada had lacked. The first Intifada had had the moral authority of non-violence; the second enjoyed the inestimable advantage of publicity. The headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, with Yasser Arafat as our president, became a focal point for diplomats, journalists, officials and politicians. Palestinian leaders met regularly in Abu Ammar's office. The Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Fatah Central Committee and other Palestinian institutions, together with the leadership of the various Palestinian factions, all met

there. There were also constant meetings with Fatah's youth leadership and its officials as well as representatives of Palestinian civil society.

The Palestinian leadership was able to become once more a central player on the political stage as the effects of the Intifada spilled over from the confines of the Palestinian territories into the wider Arab world. The thunderous demonstrations of support that took place in Arab cities from the Gulf to the far Maghreb were a great boost to the morale of the Intifada. This Arab display of identification and solidarity with the Palestinian people helped our population to shake off the mood of submission and surrender into which it had fallen in recent years. This was later to be translated into material and financial support as governments and peoples competed to offer assistance to the new Palestinian Intifada. Meanwhile, the intense interest shown by the Western media and the reports of events in Palestine seen in Europe and further afield offered an opportunity to the Palestinian leadership to rid the Palestinian issue of the negative image it had acquired and to break out of the diplomatic isolation that Ehud Barak's government had tried to impose on us after Camp David. We sought to make use of the situation to reassert the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle against a foreign occupation. The diplomatic balance, which had been strongly in Israel's favour, was readjusted.

In the midst of all this, we began to hear reports, at first uncorroborated, about differences of opinion between Israeli army commanders and leading members of the Labour-led Israeli government who were identified with the peace process. Apprehension was expressed by these Israeli ministers, who feared that the current escalation in military operations could hinder all their efforts to keep the peace process in existence. Members of the Labour government that was soon to step down feared they could lose control of the army before they released the reins of government. At the time, Israel's chief of staff was General Shaul Mofaz and his deputy was General Moshe Ya'alon, and both of them had adopted hard-line positions and made public promises to crush the Intifada and break the will of the Palestinians forever.

We were well aware, however, that the Labour government was not as a whole entirely out of step with the army. Without the backing of Ehud Barak, the military would have been unable to act as it did,

or to continue to implement Shaul Mofaz's principle that the Israeli forces must be victorious in every confrontation. Nor could they have followed Moshe Ya'alon's theory that these clashes were the most important battle for Israel since the so-called War of Independence in 1948. As the Israeli army's violence escalated, we believed that Barak had the power to take firm action to halt it. We therefore doubted that any ceasefire could hold unless he acted, and if he did not take action, the violence would become more severe.

The most serious contact we had with the Israelis at that time was not with Barak himself, but rather with Shimon Peres, who stepped into the spotlight of publicity when he visited Gaza International Airport on 1 October 2000. This was Shimon Peres's first appearance on the political scene after a long leave of absence from active politics, due to being effectively excluded by Ehud Barak, his political arch-rival. Peres's goal was to sign an agreement with President Arafat on a comprehensive ceasefire. At midday the following day two statements were simultaneously issued, one in Barak's name and the other in Yasser Arafat's. I laid the groundwork for this encounter through consultations with Abu Ammar followed by a meeting with Peres. Both had told me of their earnest desire to reach a serious understanding. Shimon Peres confirmed to me that his initiative had been authorised by Barak and his government.

The meeting between Abu Ammar and Peres, however, was not entirely successful. It began strangely, with neither leader willing to exchange greetings for the photographers. Only after the photographers had left the room did they begin to greet each other in a friendly fashion. It was a disappointment to discover from Peres that Ehud Barak had backed out from an earlier commitment to announce a ceasefire in person. The statement would now be made by a senior official, Gilad Sher, the head of Barak's office. Abu Ammar therefore postponed his own statement, authorising instead a Palestinian official to make it on his behalf. In the end no announcement of a ceasefire was ever made, not only because of this disagreement, but also because a month later, on 2 November 2000, in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem, there was a car bomb incident for which the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) claimed responsibility.

We continued, however, to look for a way to bring the conflict to a halt before the violence reached an unacceptable level. Around a week after the start of the second Intifada, the Palestinian leadership called for a special session of the Security Council, which was formally requested on our behalf by the Arab group at the United Nations. On 7 October 2000 the Security Council issued a resolution in which it condemned the Israeli attacks and the high incidence of Palestinian casualties. Fourteen of the Council's fifteen members voted for the resolution; the American delegate abstained. The resolution failed, however, to offer any response to the Palestinian demand for an international commission of inquiry to investigate the causes of the clashes and of the deaths of Palestinian civilians.

The PLO had always been careful to keep the Palestinian issue on the agendas of the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as those of other regional and international organisations, with the goal of safeguarding the legitimacy of Palestinian national rights. This was a particular concern of Abu Ammar in his role as PLO chairman. The PLO continued to exercise what pressure it could at the United Nations despite constant insistence by the United States that the issue of Palestine should not be raised at the Security Council or in the General Assembly on the grounds that Palestinians and Israelis should solve their disputes on a bilateral level. The formula adopted by Washington was that outside interference could only have an adverse effect on the development of bilateral relations between the two sides.

At this time, there were also internal differences within the Palestinian leadership. In private discussions there were sharp disagreements between us. When we could not agree, we tended to turn to Abu Ammar to make a decision. He was the constant crossroads between all our contrasting opinions; he knew the views of all sides; and his word was final. We were keenly aware that some of the Palestinian factions were attempting to carve out their own places in the Intifada, each with its own political agenda and operational tactics in the field that were beyond the leadership's control, and the Mahane Yehuda bomb was one manifestation of this. There were even certain middle-ranking leaders inside Fatah itself who had begun to promote armed operations that contradicted our official commitment

to diplomacy. The attempt by some Fatah leaders in the field to construct their own organisational bases inside Fatah was a warning sign of the appearance of schisms within the organisation. Anxiety began to grow within the higher circles of the Palestinian leadership that individual Palestinian factions might be drawn into open conflict with Israel, which was always keen to act on the principle of military might. Even an entire people, if largely unarmed, could not confront military forces armed to the hilt with heavy weapons.

On 16 October 2000, as we continued our efforts to internationalise the issue, an emergency summit was held at the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh with the participation of President Hosni Mubarak, President Clinton, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Kofi Annan (the UN secretary-general) and Javier Solana (the European Union's foreign affairs policy chief), in addition to President Arafat and the Israeli prime minister, Ehud Barak. At this meeting the issue of an international commission of inquiry was once more raised and on this occasion it was agreed that an American-led fact-finding committee should be formed that would be led by the American ex-senator George Mitchell, a former lawyer and judge who had previously been the United States special envoy for Northern Ireland. Israel attempted to limit the remit of the Mitchell Report to establishing the facts rather than making recommendations. The former Turkish president Suleyman Demirel, the Norwegian foreign minister Thørbjørn Jagland, and another American ex-senator, Warren B. Rudman, were appointed to the committee, in addition to the European Union's foreign affairs supremo Javier Solana.

Various writers and intellectuals warned of the dangers that might arise from inflamed emotions, demanding an end to the armed character of the Intifada and appealing for it to return to the form of a broad and non-violent popular movement like the first Intifada. Some within the Palestinian leadership began now to call for the Intifada to be halted before its results were nullified, with the rise of violence negating its earlier moral and diplomatic gains. Abu Ammar allowed free rein to the expression of opinion within Fatah, prioritising unity over the primacy of any particular view. On 31 October 2000 I made my own contribution to this debate in the form of a letter to Abu Ammar calling for efforts to be made to restore calm and put a

stop to violent activity in order to allow scope for the peace process. My intention was to stress that the political gains that had been made from the Intifada should be used to secure our legitimate Palestinian national rights before the Intifada turned into an armed conflict that would rob the Palestinian struggle of its civilian character. The text of my letter is given in Appendix 1.

The Mitchell committee began its work on 7 November 2000. During the time it was preparing its report, President Clinton left office and was succeeded by President George W. Bush, son of the first President Bush. On 25 February 2001 Bush's secretary of state, Colin Powell, the high-ranking general who had led the American operation to expel the Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, made his first official visit to the region, apparently to explore the situation. On his arrival he met with Ariel Sharon, who had just become the prime minister of Israel, and President Yasser Arafat. This came within the framework of what seemed initially to be an effort by the new American administration to calm the explosive situation and seek a way to return to the negotiating table.

It began to emerge, however, that President Bush was not well acquainted with global and international issues. He had said little about foreign policy in his campaign and had never travelled widely outside the United States. This was not unusual for American leaders. However, President Bush seemed particularly averse to his administration becoming actively involved in the Arab-Israeli peace talks. It was widely accepted in the Republican Party that diplomatic involvement in the Middle East had always been a source of grief for American presidents and unforeseeable political pitfalls frequently occurred. It was true that despite all the efforts made by President Clinton, and his personal commitment, his plans had come to almost nothing in the end. Nevertheless, despite the previous sorry history and Bush's personal reluctance, the Bush administration, as time went on, found itself increasingly involved in the Middle East.

Despite all our efforts, the Intifada took on more of the aspect of a violent confrontation and became less of a peaceful popular protest. In the winter of 2000–2001 it was transformed into a series of armed attacks the scope of which steadily widened to include Israeli civilian targets behind the Green Line. At the same time, we in the Palestinian

leadership continued to make every effort to regain our grip on the internal Palestinian situation, while working constantly to preserve our points of contact with Israel, some of which had been severed due to the turbulence of current developments. Much trust was lost when Israel targeted the headquarters of the Palestinian Security Forces.

Following President Bush's succession to President Clinton in the United States, Ariel Sharon's Likud party was victorious in the Israeli general elections of 6 February 2001 and Sharon became the prime minister of Israel on 7 March 2001. This inaugurated a period of unprecedented military escalation against the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority, with a series of systematic military operations designed to undermine the Palestinian security services and cast doubt upon the Palestinian Authority's standing as a political authority. The name of Ariel Sharon was already associated in Palestinian memory with the extensive expansion of settlements, massacres of Palestinians and violence in its most savage and bloody form in Palestine and Lebanon. Though none on the Palestinian side mourned the departure of Barak, who had disappointed everyone, including the Israeli electorate, the arrival in power of the Likud leader aroused no optimism. Sharon was the darling of the settlers, a stubborn opponent of the Oslo Agreement, a reckless ex-general, and a politician who would not think twice about climbing on a tank to deal with any political crisis he was facing, based on his historical belief that only force was able to secure the desired political reality. We were apprehensive of what might follow.

Sharon had entertained high hopes of President Bush's administration in the United States. He thought that there would be a meeting of minds between himself and President Bush. Sharon's first foreign visit, just a few days after he had formed his government, was to the White House. There he was received by the new American president with effusive hospitality. However, the Republican administration in practice continued to remain aloof from the Middle East conflict, in contrast to the attitude of the administration of President Bill Clinton. The State Department, now headed by Colin Powell, seemed to be unconcerned by the deterioration of the situation on the ground and made little effort to take a position on developments in the region.

On a personal level, I had already met Sharon, when he had served in the Israeli cabinet led by Binyamin Netanyahu. I had encountered him several times during that period, first while he was the minister for infrastructure and later when he was the foreign minister. In the second instalment of my account of events in Palestine, I gave a description of one of those meetings, in which Abu Mazen had also participated. Now Sharon was the prime minister, however, the picture changed. Convention and the exigencies of the situation dictated that Yasser Arafat, as the highest authority in the Palestinian leadership, would have to meet him. Abu Ammar stepped up to that responsibility and did not hesitate in initiating the process of making contact with Sharon, though Sharon had conspicuously refused to meet him in the past and had avoided shaking his hand during the Wye River negotiations, as well as blatantly ignoring him on the handful of other occasions when they had been in each other's presence. No love was lost between Arafat and Sharon, who had previously faced each other under fire in the outskirts of Beirut during the siege of the Lebanese capital in the summer of 1982. Sharon was in fact widely regarded by the Palestinians as a sworn enemy. He had openly referred to Arafat as a murderer, and Abu Ammar for his part liked to say that Sharon had tried 13 times to have him killed during the Lebanon campaign.

In fact, I have reason to believe that Abu Ammar opened a channel of communication with Sharon even before the Knesset elections. For that task he designated one of his close advisors, Muhammad Rashid, who held a meeting with Dov Weisglass, Sharon's legal adviser, just before the Israeli elections. As the elections drew nearer, Muhammad Rashid made a further attempt to establish a more direct link with Sharon, when he contacted Sharon's eldest son, Omri Sharon. A clandestine meeting between Rashid and Omri Sharon took place on 25 January 2001 at Weisglass's office in Tel Aviv, as the opinion polls were predicting that Sharon would win against Barak by a huge margin. Its purpose was to pave the way for the first meeting between Sharon and Abu Ammar. Sharon did not oppose the idea in principle, but he set conditions for the meeting, insisting that Abu Ammar should implement some measure that Sharon could accept as a tangible Palestinian initiative, such as reining in what Sharon referred to as Palestinian terrorism.

After the results of the Knesset elections were officially declared, and before Sharon had chosen his new government, Abu Ammar telephoned the Israeli prime minister-elect to congratulate him on his victory, wishing him success in achieving peace, which Sharon had promised to do if he was elected. In that call, the two leaders did not go beyond general niceties except to agree to sanction some further preliminary contacts to prepare for a first face-to-face meeting. In fact, Sharon was true to his word. He sent Omri Sharon to see Abu Ammar, together with an Israeli mediator named Yossi Ginosar whom we knew from the days of Yitzhak Rabin. Abu Ammar received these two as his personal guests at his office at the Muqataa in Ramallah with the same spirit of welcome and affability with which he always greeted those who came to see him. This meeting was widely reported by the Israeli media, and was the first contact between the two leaders.

This opened the way for direct communication between Abu Ammar and Sharon himself. However, developments on the ground, and the possibility that such a meeting would be misconstrued by both sides, as well as the absence of even a minimal level of trust between the two sides, conspired in the end to rule out the opportunity of a meeting. On the other hand, neither side seemed in practice sorry that it did not come to pass. Nevertheless, we maintained communication with the Israelis at a lower level, especially after the formation of Sharon's coalition government a month later when the Labour Party, now led once more by Shimon Peres, became part of it. Peres did his best to preserve his former image as a man of peace in order to distinguish himself to a certain degree from Sharon, who never shook off his reputation among the Palestinians as a warmonger and a supporter of invasion and settlement.

In practice, Sharon gave the settlers and the Israeli public in general a guarantee that within one hundred days of his taking office he would stop the Intifada and put an end to what he termed the phenomenon of Palestinian terrorism. He personally toured the Israeli army sectors in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and seems to have given direct orders for a new escalation in military activity. The army embarked on a new wave of attacks that seemed more widespread and pitched at a higher level of violence than before. This was accompanied by a new

wave of expansion of the settlements. The settlers set up new outposts in many locations, knowing that the Israeli army would protect them and that they had Sharon's full support. This was a man, after all, who had in the past called for the insertion of a new settlement into any area which was otherwise exclusively inhabited by Palestinians. We attempted to counter Israel's plans with a new initiative to return to peaceful protest. I met Abu Ammar together with Faisal Husseini, after Sharon announced his one-hundred-day deadline. Together, we discussed ways to block Sharon's schemes and to remove his excuses for military action by returning to peaceful protest, but our efforts were in practice soon thwarted. Developments on the ground over which we had no control and the hijacking of the Intifada by militant Palestinian factions with their own violent agendas prevented us from formulating an effective strategy.

I observed from my personal experience that the weak point in the way international mediators who came to us regarded the crisis was that they tended to think solely of the aspect of restoring calm, without paying attention to the underlying political reasons for the violence. Security, and in particular Israel's security, seemed always to be the priority. Our national cause, the Palestinian people's demand for freedom, independence and dignity, was not addressed. It was for this reason that the various efforts by American envoys such as George Tenet, Anthony Zinni, and others, were doomed to failure. I had strong views on this matter and felt I should inform President Arafat of my position. On 25 November 2000, therefore, in a further letter to Abu Ammar, I reiterated my plea that we should not agree to treat the problem as purely one of security. Another issue I raised was that we should above all avoid slipping into an ongoing violent confrontation, which would only play into the hands of the Israelis. My main point was that we should never forget the political aspects of the situation, of which the most important was to call for an international conference as part of a framework for resuming the negotiations. The text of my letter is in Appendix 1.

On the ground, however, the armed attacks being carried out by various Palestinian opposition factions undermined all efforts made by the Palestinian Authority to stem the violence and continued to provide a justification for Israel's escalation in the use of violence.

If Israel's response had been harsh under Barak, under Sharon it became excessive. Targeted assassinations were ordered, and the installations and premises of the Palestinian security forces were attacked without provocation. We heard that the Israeli chief of staff, Shaul Mofaz, had ordered that members of the Palestinian security forces should be killed every day in order to make the Palestinians understand that there was no way to win in a confrontation with the Israeli army. No genuine effort was made to calm the situation.

On 19 March 2001, the Americans took the first cautious steps on the road of renewed diplomatic involvement when Colin Powell, in an address to a conference of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), said that the Bush administration had 'inherited a situation in the Middle East in which the chance for peace became bleak in a dramatic way in the shadow of what appeared an endless whirl of violence'. But he said that allowing the dream of peace to die would be a disaster for the region. This, therefore, called for the continuation of American efforts to find political solutions which would at least put a stop to the cycle of violence. In this vein, the American secretary of state proposed three main principles which, according to him, his administration would use as guidelines. These were first, to stop the acts of violence; second, to commence a dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis which would lead to political, economic and security arrangements acceptable to both sides; and third that both sides commit themselves to avoiding unilateral acts that might provoke the other side.

Meanwhile, ex-Senator Mitchell's fact-finding mission was still preparing its report. On 30 April 2001 it published the results of its investigations. The text of the report is in Appendix 2. The Palestinian and Israeli sides were given until 15 May to respond. Despite the Israeli attempt to limit the report to the findings of the investigation, it in fact made recommendations. Of these, the principal one was that the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority reaffirm their commitment to all agreements currently in force, and that there be an immediate and unconditional ceasefire. The members of the committee reported that they could find no basis for the Israeli claim that the Palestinian Authority had deliberately planned to initiate a wave of violence. However, neither did they find proof that, as they put it, 'the Palestinian

Authority made a consistent effort to contain the demonstrations and control the violence once it began.

According to the report, 'the Sharon visit did not cause the al-Aqsa Intifada'. It commented, however, that, 'it was poorly timed and the provocative effect should have been foreseen.' The report went on to state that subsequent events were also significant, including 'the decision of the Israeli police on September 29 to use lethal means against the Palestinian demonstrators; and the subsequent failure [...] of either party to exercise restraint'. The report asked the Israeli government to ensure that the army cease to use deadly force against protestors. It also drew attention to one of the underlying issues, adding that, 'a cessation of Palestinian-Israeli violence will be particularly hard to sustain unless the GOI [Government of Israel] freezes all settlement construction activity. [...] settlement activities must not be allowed to undermine the restoration of calm and the resumption of negotiations.' The Mitchell committee recommended that all construction work in settlements cease, including what the Israelis insisted on describing as 'natural growth'.

In conclusion, the committee called on Israel to withdraw its troops to positions that pre-dated the clash, to lift the siege from all areas, to hand over the funds it owed the Palestinian Authority (Israel had ceased to transfer to the Palestinian Authority the customs and tax revenues collected by Israel on Palestinian imports), to halt the punitive demolition of houses and the destruction of agricultural areas, and to enable the Palestinians who worked in Israel to return to their jobs. At the same time, it appealed to the Palestinian Authority to take action against what it referred to as terrorism, to outlaw the use of firearms in its territories and to collect all illegal weapons. Both sides were called upon to resume security coordination and, in the words of the report, 'to abstain from incitement and hostile propaganda'.

A fixed timetable was also agreed, with dates for the implementation of the Mitchell committee's recommendations. Over the course of a period of two weeks, the situation was to be restored to how it had been before 28 September 2000. Within this two-week period, Israel was to freeze all settlement activities in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip until the end of the final status negotiations. The payment of funds due to the Palestinian Authority under the

transitional agreements was to be made within three months of the implementation of the agreement. Prisoners would be released and other outstanding agreements implemented. Negotiations for a final status settlement would resume within two weeks of the start of the implementation of the agreement, and would be completed within a year according to the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of 1999. In addition, Palestinians arrested because of the Intifada would be released within a month of the start of the implementation of the Mitchell Report. It was also agreed that the signatories of the Mitchell Report should undertake to observe and supervise its implementation. The plan was that an agreement resulting from the Mitchell Report and its implementation date would be declared during a summit meeting of all the parties who had participated in Sharm el-Sheikh, joined by Russia as the second sponsor of the peace process, and observed by the members of the Mitchell committee.

It was at this time, however, in the early stages of Sharon's administration, that the piecemeal reoccupation of the Palestinian territories began, despite all the diplomatic efforts that were being made. Israel began to mount military incursions into the sovereign Palestinian land designated under previous agreements as Area A, where there should be no challenge to full Palestinian control. With hindsight, we should have seen this as extremely ominous. The stated excuse was to capture Intifada activists. In fact, Israeli units were deliberately confronting and challenging Palestinian security checkpoints for no strategic reason. On 16 April 2001 the Israeli army launched an unprovoked attack in the outskirts of Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip. The chief of the Israeli occupation forces in Gaza declared that his forces would hold their position for days, weeks or months, as he chose. However, as the result of an American protest, which was the first time President Bush's administration had criticised Israel, the Israeli force was obliged to withdraw after 24 hours, to the irritation of Sharon's government. The Israelis seemed undeterred. On 14 May 2001 at the Bituniya checkpoint in the West Bank, five Palestinian policemen were killed in a surprise attack by Israeli combat helicopters while they were peaceably preparing to eat their evening meal. One aim of these Israeli operations seemed to be simply to gauge what the international reaction to such acts might be.

On May 15 2001 the Palestinian minister of information, Yasser Abed Rabbo, wrote to Senator Mitchell to confirm that the PLO accepted the findings of his committee and favoured the report's immediate implementation. The Palestinian leadership saw the report as positive, but criticised what it regarded as a lack of objectivity in its attitude to Israeli policy. The Palestinian leadership also expressed its reservations over the committee's failure to recommend the establishment of an international authority that would monitor both sides' implementation of the recommendations. Competition was becoming intense between diplomatic efforts seeking to achieve calm on the one hand, and the Israeli military operations that sought to block the road to any return to the peace process on the other. In the course of May 2001 I met Martin Indyk, the then American ambassador to Israel. At Ambassador Indyk's request, the meeting was also attended by my old friend from Oslo days, Terje Larsen, the Norwegian diplomat who was serving as the United Nations special coordinator in the Middle East. I understood that these two diplomats were preparing a further initiative based on the Mitchell Report: On 20 May 2001 I sent a summary of this meeting to President Arafat.

In my memorandum to Abu Ammar, I said the most important issue that emerged from the meeting was a series of unofficial suggestions made by Martin Indyk, which he described as 'just something to think about'. He asked whether calm could be restored if there were an American guarantee that settlement construction would cease during that period, if the American guarantee could be allowed to remain secret because of the sensibilities of the Israeli government to limitations on settlements. He also pondered whether a number of precise limitations on settlements, as proposed by Yitzhak Rabin, could be revived, with the formula that the boundaries of the existing settlements, outside which 'natural' expansion would not be permitted, were to be no more than 50 m from the existing houses on the periphery of the settlements. If calm were to be achieved, then a freeze on settlements could be officially declared. The implementation of the clauses of the Mitchell Report relating to the resumption of negotiations on the transitional issues and final status could then follow. I listened to his proposals but had to explain to him that I was not authorised to consider any new formula. For the Palestinian leadership, the decision had been

taken that the Mitchell Report in its entirety was the minimum the Palestinians would accept.

A few days later, on 24 May 2001, Abu Mazen and I met once more with Indyk and Larsen in preparation for our meeting with George Tenet, who was shortly to arrive in the region having been delegated by Colin Powell. Once more, I sent Abu Ammar a summary of this meeting. This summary appears in Appendix 1. We again rejected Indyk's revised proposals, continuing to insist on the implementation of the full text of the Mitchell Report. We were aware that the Americans were beginning to envisage longer periods of time for the implementation of each of the planned phases, including the final status negotiations.

Meanwhile, rumours began to circulate of a new American initiative. This would reportedly approach the situation from a perspective that was wider than the narrow focus on security concerns that had been the basis of recent suggestions, which had proved to be a principle unlikely to offer any solution to our underlying difficulties. The word was that after his initial reluctance to play any part in the search for a negotiated solution in the Middle East, President George W. Bush was planning to announce his own initiative.

At the same time, the Israelis continued to focus on the Mitchell Report, constantly drawing attention to what they said were difficulties in it. Sharon declared that Israel would only accept the report with reservations relating to the demand to halt the construction of settlements. He also rejected the implicit criticism of the Israeli army. Sharon made his acceptance of the report dependent on what he said was an essential condition, namely that Israel would only declare that it would implement the recommendations after there had been seven days of absolute calm in the territories. Sharon's condition was enough to bury the report. Israel's calculation was that Arafat was no longer in control of events on the ground and could not deliver calm even if he wished to. Unfortunately, however, though the United States remained officially committed to Mitchell's recommendations, the Bush administration did not make any serious effort to pressure Sharon into implementing the report. The Mitchell Report, which was undoubtedly full of good will, was therefore doomed to go into oblivion as had all previous agreements. This was a sad outcome, especially as

the report had recommended a series of useful steps which sought to build bridges of trust between the two sides.

In the end, Sharon's demand for a period of tranquillity killed the agreement off. We were not unaware of the deceptive nature and deliberate malice of this condition, which was unachievable in practice, both because the Palestinian Authority had no control over the armed factions responsible for individual incidents, and due to the absence of independent international observers to verify it. Sharon's consistent technique was to agree to proposals, in a way that made him appear superficially reasonable, while setting impossible conditions. His strategy was to evade the implementation of any specific recommendation, understanding or programme, whether it had been agreed on in principle or not. Sharon's specific concern at this time was to wriggle out of the proposed freeze on settlements, which were, as they had always been, his personal obsession.

In practice, only a week elapsed before Hamas, pursuing its own agenda in defiance of the wishes of the Palestinian Authority, sent one of its members to blow himself up in a disco called the Dolphinarium in Tel Aviv on 1 June 2001. Twenty-one people were killed and around 80 were injured, most of them Israeli teenagers who belonged to Russian Jewish families. Television reports showed horrific pictures. Nothing the Palestinian Authority was able to do would have staved off Israeli vengeance, though we denounced the incident and condemned it in the strongest terms. Some Israelis began to refer to Yasser Arafat as Israel's enemy number one, while the new Israeli chief of staff, Moshe Ya'alon, dismissed him as no longer relevant to the situation. However, other Israelis within the coalition government, including Shimon Peres, continued to oppose Sharon's more extreme ideas.

On the side of the Palestinian leadership, we strove day and night to contain the potential repercussions of this incident. By coincidence, on the day after the bombing the German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, and the UN envoy, Terje Larsen, were both in the region. Their intervention helped to bring about an agreement in which Abu Ammar was to read out an agreed statement before the press and observers in which he would condemn the incident in the strongest terms, while emphasising the Palestinians' commitment to the ceasefire. The European statesmen who formulated this plan felt it

should satisfy the Israeli government but it was not enough for Sharon and his friends. Many Israelis continued to accuse President Arafat of terrorism. Meanwhile, Hamas continued to celebrate their attack on the Dolphinarium regardless of the political discomfort the incident was causing the Palestinian leadership and heedless of international diplomatic pressure.

As a result of these dramatic developments, the White House took a further initiative, this time sending to the region George Tenet, the chief of the American CIA, who was charged with the task of implementing the Mitchell Report. George Tenet had visited the region previously as a representative of President Clinton in 1996 and 1998. He arrived on 7 June 2001, a week after the Dolphinarium incident, with a strict timetable to put to Israel and the Palestinian Authority according to which the two sides would be obliged to take a series of synchronised and reciprocal steps intended first to enforce the ceasefire, and then to put the Mitchell Report into effect. The text of the Tenet Plan is found in Appendix 3.

On his arrival, Tenet held a late evening meeting with the security chiefs of both sides at the Joint Liaison Centre near Ramallah. For the Palestinians, this was attended by all the chiefs of security, including Muhammad Dahlan, Jibreel Rajjoub, Amin Al-Hunaydi, Tawfiq al-Teerawi, Abdul Razzaq al-Majaydeh and Hajj Ismail Jabr. Representing Israel, various prominent security officials were present, among them Avi Dichter, the head of Shabak, Doron Almog, Yitzhak Etan and Ghiyoura Eland. The meeting was intended to be an opportunity for proposals and suggestions to be aired, but proved to be an occasion for the unleashing of a flood of accusations and insults. Tenet quickly despaired of making progress and called a halt to this inaugural meeting, distributing instead to the participants a document he had prepared in advance. He demanded a written response to his suggestions by 10 June 2001.

The timetable embodied in the Tenet Plan called for the early implementation of a number of reciprocal measures. The general thrust was to extract a guarantee from the Palestinian Authority that Israel's demands would be met, in return for specific, tangible steps on the part of Israel. Sharon gave his agreement to the document ahead of the deadline. The Palestinians asked for further discussions with

Tenet to reduce the burden of the measures they were required to implement. On 12 June 2001 George Tenet visited Yasser Arafat at his headquarters in Ramallah. I was also present. Tenet, who suffered from chronic back pain, lay on the floor in the Palestinian president's office while the conversation took place, somewhat to Abu Ammar's surprise. After a long conversation between Tenet and President Arafat, in the presence of their aides, Abu Ammar said he had one remaining reservation about the plan. He wanted to insist that it included the clause of the Mitchell Report on the freeze on settlement building. He said he would regard any shortfall in the implementation of the full text of the Mitchell Report as relieving the Palestinian side of the obligations the report imposed on us. Both sides accepted the Tenet Plan on 13 June 2001, with President Arafat and Prime Minister Sharon issuing separate declarations to that effect and agreeing to an immediate ceasefire.

We began at once to make every effort to achieve a ceasefire. Abu Ammar personally contacted dozens of Fatah chiefs and local Fatah representatives. He also obtained the agreement to the ceasefire of most of the other factions, including Hamas. He issued stern warnings about the consequences of failure to implement what had been agreed. This led to the imposition, at least for the subsequent few days, of something like the atmosphere of calm that Sharon had demanded. However, both the reluctance of the Israeli army to hold back, and on our side the persistence of the separate agendas of the militant factions, led in due course to the failure of the attempt to impose calm.

The inherent weakness of the Tenet Plan was the same as that of the Mitchell Report. The problem was that neither provided for the establishment of an independent observation apparatus that could pinpoint breaches of the ceasefire and thus ensure adherence to the provisions of the document. Tenet left behind a team of CIA officials for the purpose when he departed the region. In practice, however, they were unable to exercise sufficient authority. There was a progressive drift back to violence on the ground, with Palestinian factions resuming violent operations, which were countered by increasingly tough military responses from Israel. The apparent lack of will on the part of the United States to do what was necessary to implement its own plan led both sides to conclude that the new

administration of George W. Bush was not in practice prepared to put the necessary effort in to restart the political peace process. The absence of the experienced practitioners who had made up President Clinton's Middle East team was much regretted by the Palestinians.

Particularly difficult for the Palestinian leadership at the time was the onset of methodical targeting by Israel of the Palestinian Authority's offices and institutions. Whenever Israeli settlers or soldiers were killed in a Palestinian operation, Israel would strike in retaliation at the Palestinian Authority's infrastructure, even when responsibility for an attack was claimed by Hamas or some other faction. This gradually stripped the Palestinian Authority of its ability to stem the tide of violence. We no longer had the means, for example, to continue the collection of illegal weapons, since the centres where they were being gathered were themselves being destroyed. We were also unable to hold members of opposition factions in prisons when those prisons were being systematically bombed.

From 26 to 30 June 2001, after the failure of Tenet's visit to bear immediate fruit, the US secretary of state, Colin Powell, returned to the region for a second trip, hoping that by coming in person he would be able to exert stronger pressure on all to implement Mitchell's recommendations. However, for the Palestinians, the field was wide open for acts of nationalist and Islamic violence whose purpose was to secure greater popular support, while the militant factions increasingly competed with each other over the question of who was to lead the Intifada. In response, some of the Fatah leaders on the ground, and many of the activists in the Tanzim organisation that formed part of Fatah, were themselves impelled to become more involved in armed operations, though they concentrated their activities in the West Bank and Gaza, in contrast to Hamas's preference for operations within Israel itself, behind the Green Line. The Palestinian leadership became a prisoner of the popular mood, where the martyrdom of Palestinian suicide bombers led only to increased enthusiasm for yet more violence. All began to use the rhetoric of attack and revenge. Meanwhile, some of us, more cautiously, continued to warn that the consequences of operations behind the Green Line, though more lethal to the Israeli side, could in the end have undesirable results for the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people.

Each attack brought an Israeli response, and each response fed the feelings of revenge and hatred of the Palestinian population and undermined those Palestinians who had called for the terrible cycle of violence to be broken. The people were especially enraged when Israel responded disproportionately. This was the case on 31 July 2001 when Israeli Apache helicopters targeted a number of Hamas's most popular leaders in the West Bank. Shaykh Jamal Mansour was killed, together with Shaykh Jamal Saleem and others who were present in the Hamas media office in Nablus, as well as some innocent civilians and children. This attack provoked an extremely intense reaction. An increasing number of the Palestinian population discovered that in the bombing of restaurants, cafés, buses, nightclubs and shopping malls in Israel they possessed a weapon that seemed to balance Israel's overwhelming military supremacy. They were able to overcome the extreme imbalance of force between the two sides and in the end created an atmosphere of mutual fear. In Israel's towns, cities and villages, the shopping malls, buses and streets emptied, and tourist numbers dipped to their lowest point. Everywhere in Israel fear reigned.

The mood was grim. The Palestinian people believed their sacrifice was worth making, as Israeli civilians were at last feeling the pain that they alone had felt for so long. Israel was finally aware of the reality of a war that had for the first time begun to reach inside its borders. During all Israel's previous wars, fighting had been something that had taken place elsewhere, somewhere away from where the Israeli people conducted their daily lives. Terror had now come home to roost. In Palestinian circles the question was raised about whether suicide bombing was a morally permissible tactic. Religious dignitaries were consulted, and they began to issue fatwas declaring suicide bombing in the face of an enemy of overwhelming superiority to be legitimate. Muslim religious authorities beyond the Palestinian territories added their voices. The young men and women who chose to become martyrs became national symbols to be venerated and emulated, and they were a source of pride and honour not only to their families but to the wider Palestinian, Arab and Muslim public. Many Palestinians began to believe that Israel only understood the language of force, and looked to southern Lebanon as their model. There, the armed struggle, led by Hezbollah, had compelled a superior military force always described

as invincible to withdraw in a humiliating fashion. Many started to ask what the Palestinians would receive after all this bloodshed and these sacrifices? The prospect of a return to the situation on the eve of the Intifada hardly seemed to be a victory.

The suffering of the Palestinians intensified. Towns and villages in the Palestinian territories were isolated from each other, with military checkpoints everywhere, especially at road junctions throughout the West Bank. The number of Palestinians working in Israel fell from over a hundred thousand to little more than two thousand. Targeted assassination soon became official Israeli policy and took many victims, who were for the most part Palestinian civilians. The desperate nature of the situation led to an increase in political extremism. When living standards in the Palestinian territories began to fall as a result of the reduction in economic activity, together with the absence of the remittances of Palestinians who had previously worked in Israel, those who opposed the option of peace and negotiations began to make advances on the Palestinian political stage after the success of their eye-catching operations on the ground. Such groups advocated armed action as a more effective alternative to the negotiations favoured by the Palestinian Authority, which had not, as they saw it, led to any desired result.

In August 2001 the Israeli forces began to mount operations on the ground in the West Bank to regain dominance over more of the areas which had been classified as Area A and were therefore under full Palestinian security and civil control, as well as taking action in Jerusalem. On 9 August 2001, in the wake of an armed attack by a Palestinian faction, Israel responded by occupying the headquarters of the mayor of Jerusalem in the town of Abu Dis and closing Orient House and a number of other Palestinian offices in Jerusalem. On 28 August 2001, in response to Palestinian gunfire against the Gilo settlement nearby, Israeli army units entered Beit Jala and stayed there for two days. Such incursions into Area A land eroded the sovereignty enjoyed by the Palestinian Authority in this already limited part of its national territory.

At the time, we felt like students who had failed a tough test supposedly set by the Americans, but in which most of the difficult questions had in fact been posed by Sharon. The miscalculations we

had made, and our limited grasp of the scale of the changes planned by Sharon, guaranteed we would fail. There was no further room for ambiguous answers and ambivalent language in a world where, behind the scenes, George Bush was preparing to lead what he called an alliance of the willing against the so-called 'Axis of Evil'. Although Sharon was not able to become a member of Bush's alliance openly for tactical reasons related to the relationship of the United States with a number of Arab and Islamic countries, the Palestinians were definitely placed outside it. This left us on the edge of the Axis of Evil itself, and sometimes we felt we were being included within its growing perimeter.

3

11 SEPTEMBER 2001 AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS

On Tuesday, 11 September 2001, as the working day was beginning on the east coast of the United States, in the Middle East it was already afternoon, a time when many people were in the habit of taking a siesta. For us, the event that shook America to its very depths and changed the world, took place during those quiet hours. As the world knows, two hijacked airliners struck the Twin Towers in New York, the headquarters of the World Trade Center. A third plane struck the Pentagon, the seat of the American Department of Defense in Washington. The twin towers collapsed, leaving behind no more than smoke, dust and rubble. America's fear and confusion was even more shocking than the number of victims, which was quickly estimated to be in the thousands, and more damaging than the assaults themselves on symbols of American power. The United States was first overcome by feelings of humiliation and impotence, which were swiftly followed by anger, and then by determination to respond in such a way that would repair its image in its own eyes and the eyes of the world.

From that day onwards, rightly or wrongly, politicians, diplomats, the press and the broadcasters saw the world in a different light. We the Palestinians, both in the leadership and among the people, watched these faraway and almost incomprehensible events unfold with deep apprehension, where concern was mixed with anxiety. Like everyone around the globe, we were shocked by the potential resonance of this

unprecedented event, of which results would be far-reaching and impossible to predict.

I was taking an afternoon nap that day, as was my daily habit, when my wife, Umm Ala, saw the first images on the television, as the news broke into the usual programming. She came into my bedroom at once and shook me gently awake by the shoulder, telling me I must come and watch what she said was something strange happening in America. She said that some enormous event was taking place and that I must see the pictures and hear the news as it developed. I forced myself to wake up and joined the rest of my family, who were already gathered around the television. As I rose, I felt that what I had been told must surely have been some kind of exaggeration. I was just in time to see the second airliner strike the second tower, with the same startling explosion of fire that had been seen when the first tower was hit 17 minutes earlier, before I had woken up. I knew at once that I was indeed watching a vast operation: something that had clearly been carefully planned in advance and was being relentlessly executed before our eyes. I found it hard to grasp that these events were being broadcast live. I picked up the phone and called Abu Ammar's office in Gaza, where he was spending the day. I discovered that he was also following events, together with those who were in his office. He too had been woken from his siesta, which he was always careful to take because his days were extremely busy with the study of files and documents, briefings, meetings and visitors of all kinds.

As he spoke to me, Abu Ammar made guesses about what was going on, which turned out to be largely incorrect. Like other world leaders, he was in the dark and would only discover the truth in due course. His voice was full of emotion, and after his early speculation he began to show caution in his reaction. Soon enough, we found out what had happened. This gigantic human tragedy was the work of a group of Arab nationals, mainly Saudi citizens, who had hijacked a number of civilian aircraft and crashed them into the targetted buildings. This news deepened our apprehension of the serious nature of the situation and its extreme danger, especially before the identity of the group and their nationality had been properly established. An early report on Arab television from Abu Dhabi suggested that the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) had

declared responsibility for the attack. This caused us huge concern, though of course it proved to be untrue. However, we saw pictures of Arab youths in Jerusalem who seemed to be celebrating as if the attacks were good news.

After a series of hurried discussions between us all on the telephone, the Palestinian leadership collectively issued a statement in which we strongly condemned what we described as an act of terrorism and declared that, humble as our position was in relation to the superpower, we stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States and the entire international community against terrorism. We called on the Israeli government, in light of the dire events on the world stage, to work with us towards an immediate ceasefire and to halt the cycle of violence that had become so entrenched in our lands. Visibly overcome with emotion, Abu Ammar, speaking to reporters at his Gaza office, described the attacks as unbelievable. He went on to say: 'We completely condemn this very dangerous attack, and I convey my condolences to the American people, to the American president and to the American administration.'

Abu Ammar cancelled a planned visit to Damascus, and on the following day, 12 September, he went to the Shifa Hospital in Gaza, which had organised the collection of blood donations for those wounded in the attacks in New York. There, he donated his own blood, while the television transmitted the scene live. This symbolic act on Abu Ammar's part was enough to eclipse the effect of images that had been broadcast of the Palestinian youth apparently celebrating the attacks and elicited a positive reaction from the American administration of George W. Bush, which had until now been ignoring our President, although he had been invited to visit the White House a dozen times during Bill Clinton's term of office. This irritated the Israeli government, which even at this moment of high drama found time to deplore this unprecedented American compliment to a man against whom the Israelis had decided to mount a rabid campaign.

On the ground, of course, events only served to exacerbate our own problems. The Sharon government had already enlisted the support of President Bush's White House in its own cause. On the other hand, there had been substantial differences in opinion between Israel and the United States over what we considered to be

the right of the Palestinian people to legitimate resistance against a protracted foreign occupation that was violating international law. The Israelis, for the most part, wanted us to be regarded as terrorists; the Americans were not entirely convinced. However, the Sharon government scored a major success when it persuaded the Americans not to deal directly with President Arafat, despite his status as the elected leader of the Palestinian people. Sharon had succeeded in convincing Bush that Arafat supported terrorism and had financed at least two terrorist attacks.

Despite that, in the early months of President Bush's administration, diplomatic channels at other levels had proved to be not entirely closed. Though Bush avoided meeting President Arafat, the locally based American diplomats and visiting American delegations continued to meet Abu Ammar and other members of the Palestinian leadership at our official headquarters in Ramallah. Channels of communication had not been severed to the extent that Israel desired, but links were constantly being eroded by the poisonous drip of Israel's propaganda against Abu Ammar. Even after President Arafat's symbolic goodwill gesture towards the victims in New York, and his unequivocal condemnation of the attack, Israel mobilised its powerful diplomatic and media machine to try to ensure that there would be no warming of relations between us and the United States.

Officially, the United States would entertain no discussion of the motivation for the events of 11 September 2001. It was to be seen simply as an act of unforgivable terrorism, for which there could be no explanation and certainly no justification. In the end, however, President Bush began to listen in private to some of the veteran advisors who had counselled his father, the first President Bush, who suggested to him that the American bias in favour of Israel and against the Palestinians had contributed to the motivation of the suicide attacks in New York. He was persuaded at last that the United States needed to include Arab and Islamic countries in its new international front against terrorism. For the first time, the Bush administration began to draw a distinction between its own policies and those of Ariel Sharon's Israel. Explicit American criticism of Israel and its continued aggression against the Palestinian people began to appear. Bush and Sharon reportedly argued in a telephone call when Bush insisted that Sharon should respond to

President Arafat's call for a ceasefire and a return to the negotiating table. Sharon reportedly hung up the telephone on the president of the United States, not a thing that frequently happened. This created unprecedented diplomatic tension between Israel and the United States. Meanwhile, President Bush was continuing to exclude Israel from active participation in his international alliance because of the unnecessary embarrassment this would cause America in its attempts to enlist Arab and Muslim support.

For a short period after the events of 11 September, Israel found itself in a position in which it had never been before, except once just before the American war against Iraq in 1990: it had become a burden to its crucial strategic ally. No one wanted to see Israel in the new international alliance for fear of alienating Muslim allies. No Western country accepted Israel's attempt to define the Palestinian struggle as part of international terrorism, which was one of Israel's long-term goals. Finally, the United States saw Israel simply as a distraction that would hinder the main thrust of its efforts. Sharon was furious. On 4 October 2001, he gave a speech in which he condemned the tactics of the West. It lacked any of the usual diplomatic niceties. Bizarrely, he warned the Western countries not to repeat the mistakes of 1938, the eve of World War II, when Europe decided to sacrifice Czechoslovakia in order not to antagonise Hitler. He said: 'Do not try to appease the Arab countries at the cost of Israel, which will not be a Czechoslovakia. Israel will fight terrorism.' Colin Powell, the secretary of state, telephoned Sharon to tell him to get a grip on himself. On the Palestinian side, we watched the widening split between Bush and Sharon with optimism. We advised those in the United States who were our friends that they should take advantage of this rare positive moment to attempt to rid the Palestinians permanently of the accusation of being part of an international terrorist movement, a label which Israel never tired of attempting to pin on it.

At the same time, Israel engaged in propaganda to sully our image. We were informed by our American friends that Sharon was attempting to portray Yasser Arafat as another Osama Bin Laden, and to say that the Palestinian Authority was as bad as the Taliban. The Americans asked Arafat to sign up at once to the imminent international battle against terrorism, and Bush asked every country to clarify its position

as either 'with America or with the terrorists'. Abu Ammar was told that if he did not lend his support to this war, and if Sharon succeeded in his bid to portray him as the devil, that he would be condemned to political oblivion. President Arafat took this advice seriously. On 4 October 2001 he sent a strong message to the leaders of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, setting out in the bluntest terms that the world had changed on 11 September 2001 and would harshly reject the Palestinians if we did not behave sensibly. For this reason, Hamas, along with other militant factions, had to cease doing anything that could make the Palestinians appear to be guilty of wrongdoing. At the same time, Arafat again asked all those who had the power to do so to halt armed operations.

In response, Hamas promised to coordinate its actions with the Palestinian Authority, and at the same time the other militant factions undertook to modify their tactics in line with the current atmosphere. Unfortunately, all such commitments soon evaporated as a result of internal squabbles between the factions and the determination of some within the Palestinian opposition forces to damage the Palestinian Authority at all costs. On 7 October 2001 military intervention led by the United States began in Afghanistan. In reaction, only four days after Abu Ammar's apparently successful approach to the leaders of the Islamic movement, between 8,000 and 10,000 Hamas supporters from the Islamic University in Gaza staged a march, carrying pictures of Osama Bin Laden and celebrating the suicide bombers who had attacked the United States on its own ground. The dangers of this for the Palestinians were clear. Arafat took action at once, sending in Palestinian security forces to stop this demonstration, which they did, but at a high cost with scores of people injured. The Palestinian Authority also banned all public reference to Bin Laden and prohibited the burning of the American flag. The Hamas leadership appeared to grasp the necessity of these measures, and those of its leaders who came to meet Abu Ammar in Ramallah showed that they understood the difficulty of the situation and promised to cease carrying out bombings behind the Green Line. Suicide bombings stopped for two and a half months from that date, except for one operation undertaken by Islamic Jihad in Baysan, which led to the death of one Israeli.

Nevertheless, Palestinian armed attacks continued, despite our best efforts. On 17 October 2001 a cell belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) assassinated a member of the Israeli government, Rehavam Zeevi, the minister of tourism. Zeevi's assassination was carried out in response to the assassination by Israel of the secretary-general of the PFLP, Abu Ali Mustafa, on August 27, and its consequences proved to be a turning point. Israel, backed by the United States and the European Union, asked President Arafat to arrest those who had carried out the assassination, whose names they knew. President Arafat also knew the names, but was unable in practice to detain the men, who were protected by their factions and were beyond the reach of the Palestinian Authority's security forces. This gave ammunition to American extremists, enabling them to justify their renewed hostility to Abu Ammar.

The Americans and the Israelis once more closed ranks. The neo-conservatives seized the opportunity to identify the Palestinians as a whole with international terrorism of the kind that the United States was now committed to fighting. Relations between Bush and Sharon became less cool. Sharon apparently obtained the American acquiescence that he wanted in his security operations, which he was allowed to carry out under the banner of fighting terrorism. In addition, Sharon took the opportunity to encourage once more the building of settlements and settlement outposts, without attracting the criticism of the Americans, whose attention was engaged elsewhere. Israel began to make it clear again that it regarded the Palestinian Authority as a terrorist entity. The day after Zeevi's assassination, Sharon said, 'Arafat's days are over.' The minister for the army at that time, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, declared in a similar vein that Arafat's 'historical role' was at an end. Israeli operations were henceforth explicitly directed at the Palestinian Authority and prevented it from taking any further active role.

Ariel Sharon appeared to be ever more determined to restrict the agenda of any Palestinian-Israeli encounter to security issues, refusing to engage in any political dialogue, which robbed our meetings of meaningful content. Sharon's behaviour led us to believe that he had no political programme in mind. Shimon Peres, still the foreign minister in Sharon's coalition, was critical of Sharon's

attitude. On 28 November 2001, at a meeting of the Israeli Labour Party, Peres said, 'Negotiation on a ceasefire must take into account political and economic considerations and be conducted within a broad context. On this, we differ with the prime minister,' adding that in his view the distinction was not a technicality but of great importance if Israel truly wished to achieve a lasting peace. At this point, while there seemed to be a difference of opinion between Shimon Peres and Sharon, I initiated a series of confidential and unpublicised meetings with Peres in an attempt to conduct a political dialogue that could reopen the road for the peace process. Of course, I already knew Shimon Peres from the days when I had represented the Palestinians at the peace talks in Oslo in 1993 that had preceded the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and Abu Ammar's return to the Palestinian territories. Peres sought to present himself as the voice of moderation in Sharon's extremist government. We saw this as an opportunity. Peres and I worked on the drafting of a document that could be presented to our political superiors as a way forward. Abu Ammar was aware of our meetings, and, on the Israeli side, Peres kept Sharon informed. Despite the number of meetings we held, very little seeped out into the media, which was too preoccupied with the events of 11 September and their aftermath. I never spoke of these meetings until much later, after the Israeli press had revealed that they had taken place.

At the first meeting between myself and Shimon Peres in Jerusalem, Peres was accompanied by Uri Savir, who had also been in Oslo, and Ambassador Avi Gil, who was his closest adviser and held the post of director general at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I proposed that we should agree on our ultimate goal and that we should begin by resuming the implementation of agreements already made. I argued that it was necessary that we agree that the outcome of our negotiations had to be the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the borders of 4 June 1967, with the option of a limited exchange of land on which both sides had to agree. Once we agreed on the basic principles of the final settlement, the details of borders, the status of Jerusalem, water, settlements, and other such topics could follow. I said that we would be ready to discuss security measures, provided we knew that final status issues would also be dealt with.

On the international front, we noticed at this point that some elements within the Bush administration, despite the engagement of their attention elsewhere, were also finding time to take an interest again in the Israel–Palestine conflict. Evidently, advocates of a more equitable resolution were still able, even at this moment of difficulty and stress, to gain the President's ear. The result was that the Americans no longer appeared satisfied with Sharon's emphasis on security and his repeated demands for us to halt the violence in the Palestinian territories, as if that would resolve everything. Instead, some figures within the administration were beginning to look at deeper causes and to consider ideas for a longer-lasting solution to our problems. Naturally, we found this gratifying. In the speech given by President Bush to the UN General Assembly on 10 November 2001, which concentrated for the most part on what he called his 'war on terror', he also found time to speak about the Middle East conflict, using the term 'Palestine' clearly for the first time when speaking about the territories occupied by Israel. On the Palestine–Israel confrontation, he said:

The American government also stands by its commitment to a just peace in the Middle East. We are working towards a day when two states, Israel and Palestine, live peacefully together within secure and recognised borders as called for by the Security Council resolutions. We will do all in our power to bring both parties back into negotiations. But peace will only come when all have sworn off, forever, incitement, violence and terror.

The pro-Israel lobby in the USA was not comfortable with President Bush's suggestion of two states. The lobbying group the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) issued a statement in response to Bush's United Nations speech in which it declared that several of the President's advisors, whom they said must have encouraged him to make his statement, were undermining America's struggle against terror. Despite the evident ambiguity within the administration, the Congress, conscious of the power of lobbyists with their electorate, continued to be resolutely pro-Israeli and opposed to our case. On 16 November 2001, 89 senators sent a letter to Bush congratulating him on his refusal to meet Yasser Arafat 'as long as he did not offer

to stop violent acts against Israel'. They also demanded that President Bush's administration should not oppose Israel's operations against the Palestinians; instead the United States should make a public declaration of its support for such actions.

Though members of Congress were hostile to the Palestinians, the more moderate faction within the administration seemed at that moment to have the upper hand. On 17 November 2001 this began to be translated into practical steps when Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the appointment of yet another Middle East envoy, General Anthony Zinni, a general in the United States Marine Corps, who had formerly been the head of US Central Command (CENTCOM), which was responsible for American interests in the Gulf region. The appointment of General Zinni was welcomed by the Palestinian leadership and was seen as a real indication that the Americans were going to become more involved in the conflict, which was something that the Palestinian leadership wanted.

They looked into General Zinni's background and received intelligence reports that showed him in a positive light, detailing his close relationship with Colin Powell and the favourable attitude towards him of the various Gulf governments with which he had been in contact. We were told that he was insightful and intelligent and had a good knowledge of the complexities of the politics of the Gulf, where he had won the trust of the rulers of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Zinni's experience of violence in Muslim Africa was also significant. In October 1993 he had been the commander in Somalia at the time of the Blackhawk incident when a number of American soldiers had been killed and their bodies dragged through the streets. In this challenging situation he had shown his ability to avoid misplaced overreaction and thus prevent a bad situation from becoming worse. He had also dealt with another crisis as the commander responsible for American operations in Yemen when the American ship USS Cole was attacked in the harbour at Aden on 12 October 2000. In addition, he had served as a commander in the American forces in the First Gulf War, which was prompted by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1990 and 1991.

Zinni also had the ear of the State Department and the Pentagon, and had been a researcher at the Center for Strategic and International

Studies at the University of Georgetown, where he had made useful contacts. There, he had provided a bridge between the mainly more moderate diplomats in the State Department and the harder-line military officials in the Pentagon. Powell had already made use of Zinni's moderate stance to balance the more radical views of Pentagon officials such as Paul Wolfowitz. Though Zinni did not have direct experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Powell evidently believed that he would take a fair view of the differences between the two sides. Zinni's appointment enraged pro-Israeli hardliners in the Pentagon, who were biased towards Israel in any conflict with the Palestinians.

On 19 November 2001, as Zinni prepared to begin his mission, the secretary of state, Colin Powell, in a speech at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, reiterated the position taken by Bush at the United Nations. He called on the Palestinians to confirm that their aim was the establishment of a separate Palestinian state adjacent to Israel which would coexist with Israel in peace. The Secretary of State said he was aware that American help was required to make progress in resolving the Middle East conflict. However, he demanded that there be an end to all violence on the part of the Palestinians and that the Palestinian Authority fully abide by all agreements it had made. Despite the implicit criticism of the Palestinian leadership, we received this warmly. On 23 November, in preparation for General Zinni's arrival, we formulated a document containing a statement of principles developed in light of the new American interest in the Middle East. The text of this document is in Appendix 1.

General Zinni arrived in the region on 26 November, accompanied by Assistant Secretary of State William Burns, on a long visit that lasted until 16 December, during which he began his efforts to bring about the implementation of the Tenet Plan and the recommendations of the Mitchell committee. Although Israel ostensibly welcomed Zinni's mission, many Israeli officials were privately highly critical of it. They deplored it in principle and claimed that Zinni lacked experience and would fail to grasp the complexities of the situation Israel faced. They also said that he would not understand what they patronisingly called the 'Palestinian mentality'. Clearly, what they had in mind was the danger that Zinni would perceive the ways in which Israel's actions

were unjust to the Palestinians. They also feared that Zinni would resist the pressure of the American Jewish lobby, especially since he had never, despite his elevated military rank, shown any desire for high political office. It would be hard to bring pressure to bear on a man with no political ambition. The Israelis hated the idea that Zinni would lecture them on the basis of his great military experience and would repeat to Sharon what they had already heard from Colin Powell, that his army had lost control and lacked discipline.

Zinni's mission during his first tour in the region was not only to investigate the facts of the current unrest but also to report to the American administration on whether or not Yasser Arafat was a legitimate partner in the search for peace. Though we had welcomed Zinni's arrival, some of us feared that he might take a tough stance on matters with Arafat, demanding an end to violence against Israel no matter what the cost might be to us. However, it soon became clear that he intended to ask the Israelis to drop their unreasonable conditions and reconsider their refusal to halt settlement activities. He also appeared to take on board the possibility that Arafat was in fact unable to control the forces that were carrying on the violence linked to the Intifada and should therefore not be blamed for non-compliance. Overall, General Zinni earned our respect during this visit and renewed our confidence in the seriousness of America's commitment to a ceasefire. He struck us, as our initial assessment had suggested, as a realistic military man who was also a prudent diplomat, able to grasp both the necessary details of the ceasefire and the broader political context. He promised us that he would help to implement the vision of a two-state solution that President George W. Bush had announced at the United Nations.

It is important to be aware that Colin Powell's firmly held belief was that he would be able during his time in office to reach a solution to Middle East peace if there was a genuine will on the part of both the Palestinians and the Israelis. More importantly, if his conclusion, based on Zinni's observations, was that Arafat was in fact a potential partner for peace, and that it was actually Israel that was dragging its feet, his intention was to lay the blame clearly at Sharon's door in an unprecedented manner. It appeared to us that Colin Powell was constantly obliged to fend off the interference of the hardliners in the

State Department and the Pentagon who believed that the United States should forge a strategic alliance with Israel to fight Afghanistan and other enemies of the United States such as Iraq and Syria, and should disregard the Arab world. On 4 December 2001, however, despite the continuing efforts of Colin Powell to make a breakthrough, Ariel Sharon's government severed all communication with the Palestinian Authority following a series of bomb attacks carried out by militant Palestinian factions, on the specious grounds that this indicated that the Palestinian Authority itself had become an entity that supported terror.

Meanwhile, clandestine meetings were continuing between myself and Shimon Peres, together with other representatives of the Israeli foreign ministry. I left the Palestinian territories unannounced to fly to Italy in December 2001 to pursue these talks. From 10 to 14 December 2001 there was a series of meetings in Rome under the auspices of the city's socialist mayor, Walter Veltroni, between Peres and his staff and a Palestinian delegation headed by myself. Before Peres's arrival, Uri Savir represented the Israeli side, sometimes backed up by Avi Gil. We met at a different venue each day in order not to attract attention, and continued our efforts to develop a joint paper on which agreement would be reached. The meeting in Rome was an attempt to move forward with the formulation of a document that took into account reservations raised by Ariel Sharon, particularly over final status issues. Veltroni set up five meetings between us and Uri Savir. Then Peres arrived in person and we also held lengthy talks with him, again moving between different venues. Once, we met in the strange and eerie atmosphere of an ancient church in the city at night, where we talked until five in the morning.

At our face-to-face meetings, Peres and I reviewed what had been agreed in the sessions of the previous days with Uri Savir. We summarised these conclusions in a working paper one-page long, which essentially comprised the principles and concepts of what was at the time becoming known as the Abu Ala-Peres Document. Peres expressed his reservations over my proposal that the borders of the Palestinian state should be those of 4 June 1967, with the possibility of the exchange of limited areas of land if both sides were in agreement. He preferred that the borders be in accordance with Security Council

Resolutions 242 and 338. I said this could only be accepted if there was a guarantee that there was to be no dilution of the text of these two resolutions or any equivocation as to their meaning. The document remained open to later changes which could potentially overturn all that had been agreed.

The text of the document, as we left it, may be summarised in a number of clauses, the most important of which were as follows:

1. There should be mutual agreement to end violence and resume political negotiations according to the following steps:

There should be a total guarantee of the ceasefire under the auspices of the United States and immediate implementation of the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell Report and its recommendations, including action against terrorism, the collection of weapons, lifting the siege and blockade of Palestinian institutions, a freeze on all settlement activities, the transfer of moneys due to the PA, a halt to attacks and targeted assassinations and the establishment of a unified Palestinian security force. This stage should be implemented within six weeks.

2. Within eight weeks, Israel will recognise a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338). Palestine will recognise the state of Israel (on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338).
3. Negotiations on the final settlement between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel will begin in the eighth week. They will include all the issues presently on the agenda. These are: a timetable for a staged withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories of the state of Palestine to the borders of 4 June 1967 (Israel demands that this should read 'borders that are agreed on'), the resolution of the refugee issue, the status of Jerusalem, the status of settlements, security issues, water use and rights, and Palestine's relations with third-party countries. These issues will be discussed in negotiations that will end within a period of no longer than 9–12 months, and implementation will take place within a period of no longer than 18–24 months.
4. Issues relating to the role of international or regional actors in relation to the peace process, including the provision of peace-keeping forces, economic and financial aid to the Palestinian economy, and economic co-operation and adjudication (on matters where there are differences) will be discussed between the two states.

In reality, there were a number of divergent points of view between the two sides which we left for later discussion. I noted down the differences between the two sides; the most important of these were as follows:

1. On the border of the Palestinian state, the Israeli side proposed following Resolutions 242 and 338, while the Palestinian side demanded the borders of 4 June, 1967.
2. On the resumption of negotiations, Israel asked for negotiations over withdrawal after recognising the Palestinian state to be allowed to continue for 12 months, while the Palestinian side demanded that they be no longer than 9 months.
3. On the implementation of the agreement, the Israeli side suggested that this be accomplished over 24 months, while the Palestinian side demanded that it be completed within 18 months.

On 14 December 2001, having returned from Italy to the Palestinian territories, and continuing our efforts to restart negotiations on the political issues, I headed a Palestinian political and security delegation which met General Zinni at the Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah on the eve of his departure for Washington DC on 15 December, following his recall by the State Department in reaction to the sudden deterioration of the situation on the ground. We concentrated on current events and the need to halt the mutual escalation of violence. I stressed again the hopes that we on our side were pinning to his mission and confirmed our commitment to the Mitchell Report and the Tenet Plan, as well as to all the previous agreements we had signed. I pointed out, however, that unless we jettisoned the fallacious approach favoured by the Israelis of focusing all effort on security to the exclusion of everything else, with no heed to broader political concerns, then success would not be achieved. I also pointed out the simple fact that Israel's insistence on continuing to establish new settlements and enlarge those which existed was the primary obstacle. A freeze on settlements would give hope to the Palestinian population, and no narrow, temporary security-based solution would be helpful in the long run. What the Palestinian public needed to see was permanent change.

In reply, General Zinni said he agreed with us that the components of success were present in the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell Report. He said he was aware of the need to create a new political climate,

but the difficulty was beginning the process. He argued that, despite all our reservations, a security mechanism could be the starting point. This could emerge from a tripartite commission involving Israel and ourselves as well as the United States. He stressed that words must be accompanied by deeds, and any statement of commitment had to be accompanied by appropriate action. However, he insisted that the establishment of security was the only immediate starting point he could see, advising us to accept this first and press for political negotiations later. Before he left, he confirmed his own commitment to seeing the process through and his willingness to listen to the positions of both sides.

On 23 December the text of the 'Abu Ala-Peres Document' was leaked and was published in the Israeli media. Sharon's initial reaction was to say that the plan was 'imaginary' and that any talk about it could cause great harm to Israel. His office claimed that the Prime Minister had never given his approval to any such project and its existence was potentially very dangerous. However, after a meeting between Peres and Sharon, a joint statement was issued on the same day which said: 'Peres's talks with Palestinian Legislative Council speaker Abu Ala are aimed at bringing an end to terrorism, violence, and incitement, and enabling progress in political negotiations after the cessation of terrorism.'

A source in Sharon's office confirmed that Sharon had actually given his conditional approval to Peres's contact with us because the positions proposed by Peres had not gone beyond principles acceptable to Sharon. The source added that Sharon had known about the talks for months and had agreed to them in order to maintain the unity of his coalition government. The source also indicated that Sharon's view was that in the end Peres would gain nothing from Arafat and therefore Sharon had nothing to lose. In the unlikely event that there was an agreement for a ceasefire, Sharon would get the credit for it and reap the benefits, and if Peres failed then Sharon would continue to lead the coalition, while the Labour Party would pay the political price for their failure. Sharon's colleagues took a similar view, though most adopted a harder line against the Peres talks. Natan Sharansky and Eli Yishai demanded that Sharon clarify what negotiations Peres had been undertaking with me, and the extent to which the Prime

Minister's office had been involved. In Yishai's opinion, the fact that such political negotiations had been taking place contradicted the government's decision that there should be no negotiations without a ceasefire.

Thereafter, I felt free to discuss the issue myself. While I was in Cairo on 27 December, I told the press that it was true that I had been in contact with Shimon Peres, but though we had held meetings and discussions, no agreement document had resulted. On the other hand, it was now undisputed that we had met and held talks, and that some kind of draft had emerged. The immediate outcome was that the content of the Abu Ala-Peres Document was officially repudiated by the leadership on both sides. Some of my Palestinian colleagues understood that these talks were an attempt to escape from the single-minded focus of the Israelis on security, and to add a political dimension that had been absent since Sharon's taking of office nearly a year before. We were at least talking about the recognition of a Palestinian state, and if the issue of borders between us began to be discussed, the questions of sovereignty, settlements, water and Jerusalem could follow. Nevertheless, Abu Ammar rejected the supposed draft, and so did Sharon, as if Peres had acted without authorisation. Meanwhile, continuing violence on the ground, and unrelenting pressure by Israel on the Palestinian leadership, combined with a return by Sharon to the mantra that there was no Palestinian partner for peace, gradually undermined what Shimon Peres and I had attempted to do. Thus, this optimistic attempt at a draft agreement joined the debris of other previous endeavours.

4

MEDIATORS Americans and Arabs

As 2002 began, General Zinni kept the promise he had given us in December. He returned to the region on 3 January, and continued to attempt to achieve a breakthrough despite Israel's obstinate refusal to reopen serious negotiations. Shortly after his return I met him for a second time, on this occasion at my office in the Palestinian area of Abu Dis, close to Jerusalem. This was a bilateral meeting between myself and General Zinni, who was accompanied by some of his aides. We concentrated once more on the issue of security. I insisted that the situation on the ground was worsening, with the result that the lives of the Palestinian population had become well-nigh intolerable. I thoroughly briefed him on the economy of the Palestinian territories and the extent to which it had sunk, with unemployment by now virtually universal. I let him know that the systematic humiliation of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints carried on unabated, and the continuing siege that prevented President Arafat from leaving Ramallah, even to go to Bethlehem for the Christmas celebrations which he normally attended, was diplomatically unacceptable. I reiterated my conviction that we should raise our sights to look at longer-term political issues beyond the immediate establishment of security. Without this, there would be no prospect of change.

General Zinni was soon faced with two difficult issues. One of these related to the arrest of Ahmad Saadat, the head of the PFLP, after the assassination of the Israeli minister, Rehavam Zeevi. The

other related to the ship *Karine A*, a Tonga-registered freighter intercepted in the open sea by the Israelis on 3 January, just as Zinni arrived, with a cargo of 50 tonnes of arms that the Israelis alleged were destined for the Palestinian Authority, an accusation which found willing listeners in the American administration. I informed Zinni as soon as I could of the Palestinian objections to the arrest of Ahmad Saadat, but agreed that he could be placed under observation. I also took the opportunity to ask him to intervene with the Israelis to allow President Arafat to move between Palestinian cities. Zinni replied that those were matters that were beyond his remit and it would be inappropriate for him to raise them with Ariel Sharon. He reminded me that Israel's maintenance of checkpoints was not unjustified and that during his previous visit there had been repeated suicide bombings. However, in the end he agreed to raise our concerns with the Israelis.

As to the *Karine A* and its cargo of illicit arms, the Israeli government claimed that they had incontestable evidence that the Palestinian Authority was responsible for it. We did all we could to refute the Israeli accusations. They alleged that the ship had been purchased by a Palestinian acting for the Palestinian Authority, and that the arms were intended to tip the scales in the balance of power between the Israeli government and ourselves. The incident threatened to cause more tension than even the assassination of Rehavam Zeevi, and its repercussions would continue. In the second week of January, Israel stepped up attacks as a reprisal. On 17 January 2002, still attempting to counter the accusations against us, President Arafat set up a commission of inquiry to investigate the incident and make recommendations to prevent any future smuggling of weapons into the occupied territories. On 19 January 2002 he wrote to President Bush asking for an American representative to participate in the inquiry and he also invited the European Union and Russia to contribute. However, there was no response from those invited. He asked Israel to take part as well, but they too failed to respond.

The remit of the commission Abu Ammar established was to discover whether the *Karine A* was in fact bound for Palestinian territory or not and to investigate whether Palestinian officials were responsible for what Israel was presenting as a gross breach of the

prior commitments entered into by the Palestinian Authority. Based on the commission's preliminary recommendations, Arafat detained the Palestinian Authority's finance officer, Fuad al-Shawbaki, and arrested two officers from the Palestinian naval forces. Despite the steps Abu Ammar was taking, including condemning what he termed suicide attacks, in accordance with Israel's demand, and calling for a comprehensive and immediate cessation of all armed attacks, Israel chose this moment to launch an assault on his offices in Gaza.

On 21 January 2002, while I was in the United States, I took advantage of an excursion to New York to meet Israel's foreign minister, Shimon Peres, who was as it happened visiting the United Nations. Our purpose was to discuss how to mitigate the violence of the Intifada and find a way to return to the negotiating table, and perhaps to resuscitate our previous attempt at reaching the principles for an agreement. However, unfortunately we were unable on this occasion, in the strained atmosphere, to find a way forward. During this trip, I also took advantage of my time in Washington DC to meet several high-ranking American officials, including Colin Powell. During our conversation, the Secretary of State broached the question of the *Karine A*. This was currently the hottest issue in relations between the Palestinians and the American administration, since American officials had already indicated that they agreed with Israel's claim that President Arafat was himself ultimately responsible for the shipment of arms the ship was carrying.

The American administration conspicuously refrained from criticising Israel's renewed aggression against the Palestinian Authority. In a speech he made on 25 January 2002, President Bush said that Yasser Arafat had 'disappointed him', gratuitously adding that the weapons shipment that had been discovered was an escalation of terror. However, Colin Powell still seemed to be willing to take a different line from that of the White House and appeared to be, as he had been before, more understanding of our position. His goal was evidently to resolve the issue of the *Karine A* before it disrupted relations between the United States and ourselves. He strongly advised me to tell President Arafat to carry out the appropriate penal sanctions against those involved.

At the same time, however, in a surprising development given what was happening, Ariel Sharon indicated that he would welcome a meeting with a high-level Palestinian delegation, though it was made clear to us that he did not wish to come face-to-face with President Arafat. Abu Ammar chose to make up the delegation with colleagues who had previously met Sharon and therefore asked Abu Mazen, Muhammad Rashid and myself to go to Jerusalem to meet the Israeli leader. We accepted an invitation to dinner at Sharon's official residence on 30 January 2002. When we met Sharon, we did go over past events but our conversation mainly concerned future prospects. For our part, we emphasised the need to resume the peace talks and to do our utmost to overcome the obstacles that lay in the path of an agreement, given the background of the second Intifada and Israel's violent reaction. Sharon insisted on accusing the Palestinians of being exclusively responsible for the violence, which he insisted we could and must bring to a halt.

The meeting lasted long after dinner and into the evening. Sharon seemed relaxed and confident, aware that his electoral victory against Ehud Barak had been overwhelming and convinced that he would be able to establish a broadly based and stable coalition government, given the unprecedented number of Knesset seats held by Likud. He told us that he had four years to achieve peace with the Palestinians and could take his time. I responded by saying, 'Why wait four years? That is a long time. We can reach this goal in six months.' Sharon, however, who did not like to show his hand, did not clarify his intentions. He neither responded to my proposal to go ahead quickly nor did he reject it. He did, however, say he was prepared to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian state which would comprise 42 per cent of the West Bank, including the land categorised as A and B under the Oslo Agreement.

It was evident that Sharon's basic ideas had not changed since the previous occasion when I had gone to meet him at his ranch in the Negev. His assumption was that it was too early to reach an agreement on the final status issues, and this had been demonstrated by the difficult course negotiations had taken under Ehud Barak. In addition, he did not consider himself obligated to follow previous unsuccessful negotiations. For this reason, he proposed a long-term transitional agreement which would give the Palestinians geographical contiguity while Israel would retain security zones that would allow it to have

defensible borders. In his offer, Sharon included promises to improve the living standards of the Palestinians, to reduce the burden of the military checkpoints and allow more Palestinian workers into Israel, and to establish industrial areas, as well as other similar promises none of which ruled out the possibility that Israel might take yet more Palestinian land.

He also attempted to get us to agree to a written plan he had already prepared, but, having not been prepared, we refused either to look at or to listen to it. We did not want to give any indication that might inadvertently imply our acquiescence in his expansionist and colonialist attitude. It was especially important for us not to do so since Sharon had not even formed his coalition government yet and was therefore making entirely unilateral proposals that did not have the moderation that would come from having to take other political views into account. He was at the time, we knew, attempting to shed his erstwhile reputation as a military man who believed in the principle of force and its ability to produce political miracles, and to promote a new image of himself as a responsible political leader.

We therefore agreed between us that on this occasion we would only discuss short-term issues, which were mostly related to restoring calm and tranquillity to the land. For our part, we proposed a total ceasefire that would require a return of the Israeli forces to the positions they had occupied on 28 September 2000, as well as the restoration of communication on security issues between the two sides, together with other such steps that could improve the political climate and restore the trust between us that had been lost. The road would then be open once more for serious talks on peace, which would culminate in the resolution of the final status issues. We also discussed the possibility of a face-to-face meeting between Sharon and Arafat, suggesting that preparations could be made away from the public eye, in the hope that such an encounter might bear real fruit rather than proving to be merely yet another photo opportunity.

Meanwhile, the so-called Abu Ala-Peres Document, though it had been officially rejected by both sides, was still in play. There were persistent reports of tension between Sharon and Peres, the bold veteran of the Oslo Accords, who continued to have his own ideas about how to press forward with the peace process. On 11 February

2002 *Haaretz* reported that Peres intended to put a plan to his Labour Party colleagues that he hoped to see adopted as Labour policy, which was basically what he and I had discussed and had taken concrete form as the Abu Ala-Peres Document. The title Peres gave his plan was 'Political Horizon – A Palestinian State First.' The newspaper report summarised the Peres plan as follows:

1. Stabilisation of the security situation, a complete cease-fire, implementation of the working plans in the Mitchell and Tenet documents, confidence-building measures between both sides, a war on terror, concentrating all the weapons in the hands of the Palestinian authorities.
2. Mutual recognition of Israeli and Palestinian states before permanent borders between the two countries are defined. In the meantime, sovereignty will be based on territories under full or partial Palestinian control. Future borders would be defined by UN Resolutions 242 and 338.
3. Negotiations on the permanent agreement will begin in the eighth week after the ceasefire comes into effect, and will be completed within one year.

Peres implied that Sharon was well aware of the principles of the Abu Ala-Peres Document when he said that the proposals Sharon had been discussing in Washington were not far removed from it. Likud sources played down this suggestion. We gathered, however, that Sharon appeared at least to have been keeping an open mind towards the document.

On 14 March 2002 Colin Powell sent General Zinni back to the region for a third visit. On this occasion, he was first briefed by Israeli security chiefs and then, on Thursday 15 March, he went to Sharon's Negev ranch to meet Sharon, Peres and the defence minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, after which he travelled on to Ramallah later the same day to meet President Arafat. On Friday 16 March 2002 he met President Arafat for a second time. After General Zinni's first meeting with President Arafat, I also spoke to him, in the presence of Muhammad Dahlan and Jibreel Rajoub, the Palestinian heads of security. On this occasion, his remit was to urge that the CIA director George Tenet's proposals for the implementation of the Mitchell Plan be carried out. At the same time, the UN Security Council once

more took up our affairs by passing a series of resolutions relating to Palestine. Resolution 1397 of 12 March 2002, which embodied proposals already made by General Zinni and was passed just before his arrival in the region, confirmed the desirability of a two-state solution and demanded an immediate cessation of all violent acts, together with the implementation of the Mitchell Plan and the Tenet recommendations.

On the international Arab front, there were also determined efforts to come to the aid of the Palestinians. A key Arab League summit meeting was held in Beirut on 27 and 28 March, where the then crown prince (later King) of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdullah, seized the opportunity to put forward a peace proposal. This Arab peace plan was simple. Israel had to withdraw entirely from all occupied Arab territories and return to its boundaries, as they existed on 4 June 1967. It also had to agree to a just solution to the Palestinian refugee question in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948, and accept the existence of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Clearly, this would be a lot for the Israelis to accept. In return, however, the Arab states would offer a great deal: all the Arabs would sign peace agreements with Israel and establish normal relations with it, thus bringing the international Arab-Israeli conflict to an end.

This was in part a response to the increasingly dire situation of the Palestinians and the perception that something had to be done for them. It was also a bid by Saudi Arabia to demonstrate its commitment to peace in the Middle East and to the Palestinian cause. What became known as the Arab Peace Initiative represented ideas the Arabs had long been discussing. In the present form, as a Saudi initiative, it could perhaps be seen to date back to the events of 11 September 2001, when the Saudi government had been deeply embarrassed to learn that 15 of the 19 hijackers of the aircraft used in the attacks on the twin towers in New York were from Saudi Arabia.

The initial reaction of the United States was cautious. The State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher, described the Arab initiative as a 'positive and important step'. A few days later, the secretary of state, Colin Powell, agreed it was an important step but warned that further detail was needed. President George W. Bush praised the

Crown Prince's ideas and said that the proposal was hopeful. A few days later, the national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, was more specific when she said, 'we appreciate the reality that Prince Abdullah was prepared to declare so frankly that the normalisation of relations between the Arab countries and Israel is possible'. However, Rice refused to accept the clause relating to a return to the 1967 borders, adding that in the view of the United States this would need to be the subject of negotiations. Nevertheless, the Saudi initiative definitely aroused the interest of the American administration. Colin Powell immediately sent his assistant secretary of state, William Burns, to Riyadh to enter into direct dialogue with the Saudis on the issue.

The Israeli foreign minister, Shimon Peres, also praised the initiative. President Moshe Katsav invited Crown Prince Abdullah to come to Jerusalem to discuss the proposal. Prince Abdullah, however, ruled out such a meeting, saying it was out of the question that he should visit Israel and that neither the Israeli president nor Prime Minister Sharon would be welcome in Riyadh. Sharon was more cautious, restricting himself to hints that he would not be unwilling to meet the Saudi leadership on neutral territory to discuss any plan. There was therefore some initial similarity between the American and Israeli responses, but with time they began to diverge as Washington's interest in the proposal grew and Israel's waned.

As for other Arab reactions, Egypt, Jordan and several Gulf countries had already expressed their full and direct support for the initiative in its draft form. However, it was significant that there was no direct response from Syria. Ahead of the Beirut Summit, the Jordanian foreign minister, Marwan Muasher, had presented the idea to the Syrians. Meanwhile, Lebanon, under Syria's umbrella, was also hesitant. The Lebanese government wanted more detail about the consequences of any such agreement for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. On 5 March, well before the summit, Syria's President Bashar al-Assad had gone to Jeddah for talks with Crown Prince Abdullah. Two days earlier, Bashar had also discussed the issue with the Lebanese president, Emile Lahhoud, the summit's host. The Saudi initiative was not mentioned in the communiqué they issued, which declared that any solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict had to include all the relevant United Nations resolutions, including by implication General Assembly Resolution 194,

which called for the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes or to receive compensation in lieu. This had apparently not originally formed part of the Saudi initiative but was included in it by the time it was presented to the summit. In Jeddah, the Syrian leader was careful not to emphasise any reservations he may have had regarding the Saudi plan, and Syria in due course expressed official satisfaction with what it had learned about the Saudi position.

It transpired that there was reason for Syria's satisfaction. Crown Prince Abdullah's plan had evolved under Syrian pressure before the Beirut summit. The Saudi agreement to include Resolution 194 appeared to be enough for Damascus to fall in line. During a meeting of Arab foreign ministers on 24 March in preparation for the summit, Farouk al-Sharaa indicated that he was unhappy with the expression 'full peace' and preferred to replace it with the term of 'natural peaceful relations'. The Saudis agreed. The Lebanese foreign minister, meanwhile, pursued the question of the refugees. He took the view that Resolution 194 did not provide for compensation and he was determined to have a specific paragraph precluding the permanent resettlement of Palestinians in Lebanon.

In the end, as might have been predicted, Israel simply ignored this unprecedented Arab offer of peace. Though normal relations with the Arabs were on offer, it was simply too big a step for them to take. While the American administration, through its spokesmen, had come round to describing the initiative as 'a positive and important step', Israel continued to intensify its siege of President Arafat's headquarters at the Muqataa complex in Ramallah. Even as the Arab leaders met in Beirut on 27 and 28 March 2002 to endorse the Saudi initiative, Israeli tanks and military bulldozers were closing in. The ironic consequence was that Abu Ammar was unable to attend the summit himself for the first time in his leadership of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. Nevertheless, he prepared a written speech to be delivered to the summit via a live video link.

Incidentally, the disunity of the Arab world was exposed when certain Arab leaders attempted to ban him from addressing the summit in this way, arousing the suspicion that they were motivated by unrelated grievances against President Arafat and were simply seizing an opportunity to embarrass him. The Palestinian delegation

was infuriated by this attitude and Farouq al-Qaddoumi (Abu al-Lutuf), the head of the PLO's political bureau in Tunis, who led the delegation, threatened that the Palestinians would withdraw entirely from the conference. This, along with a show of some solidarity by other Arab countries, obliged the summit to agree to Abu Ammar's address, which was also broadcast live on television. The text of the address is in Appendix 1.

Finally, despite the various compromises and negotiations which had preceded the Beirut Summit and continued in parallel with it, the Arab leaders unanimously adopted Prince Abdullah's initiative. In his own speech from the summit, which was also broadcast live on television from the conference chamber, the Saudi Crown Prince said:

Allow me at this point to directly address the Israeli people, to say to them that the use of violence, for more than 50 years, has only resulted in more violence and destruction, and that the Israeli people are as far as they have ever been from security and peace, notwithstanding military superiority and despite efforts to subdue and oppress. Peace emanates from the heart and mind, and not from the barrel of a cannon, or the exploding warhead of a missile. The time has come for Israel to put its trust in peace after it has gambled on war for decades without success. Israel, and the world, must understand that peace and the retention of the occupied Arab territories are incompatible and impossible to reconcile or achieve. I would further say to the Israeli people that if their government abandons the policy of force and oppression and embraces true peace, we will not hesitate to accept the right of the Israeli people to live in security with the people of the region.

The apogee of Israel's ongoing military operations at this time came on 29 March 2002 when the Israeli army embarked on what it called Operation Defensive Shield. This was a response to a series of armed operations by militant Palestinian groups against Israeli civilian targets in Israel that had culminated on 27 March in a high-profile attack on a hotel in Netanya in which some 30 Israeli civilians died, mainly elderly holidaymakers. The Israeli operation was the most wide-ranging military attack it had undertaken in the West Bank since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. It was to end in what was virtually the reoccupation of the West Bank, disregarding all previous agreements reached by the Palestinian Authority with

successive Israeli governments. In addition, when the Israeli tanks and bulldozers surrounded the Muqataa complex in Ramallah, Abu Ammar's headquarters and the seat of the Palestinian leadership, which had already been under siege, the thrust of Israel's actions also seemed to point clearly to a political objective. From that moment, we felt that Israel intended to target Abu Ammar directly.

The Israeli operation against President Arafat's headquarters stopped just short of its occupation, leaving him only his own office and those of a small number of his close aides. The timing was such that it was hard to avoid the conclusion that this was Israel's response to the Arab peace offer, though in the first quarter of 2002 the cycle of reciprocal violence, as Israel escalated its military response to the Intifada, was already more intense than it had ever been. The Israeli army did not hesitate to use lethal weapons to inflict casualties on the Palestinians, while from the Palestinian side it must be said that during this period there were 40 attacks inside the Green line, of which some were on civilians and others were armed bombing attacks on the Israeli occupation forces. In all, by the end of 2002, 450 Israelis had lost their lives and it was in this year that violence was at its height.

In the course of the Israeli assault, the buildings that had made up the Muqataa complex had been demolished one by one until at last the Israeli forces were at the doorstep of Abu Ammar's personal office. The systematic and destructive attack was only halted after desperate negotiations on the part of the Palestinian leadership, with the bulldozers stopping just short of the final act. However, all President Arafat's communications were severed except for a single mobile telephone which was extremely difficult to charge as the electricity supplies had been cut off. The situation exceeded our worst nightmares. Some of President Arafat's guards who refused to surrender when called to do so were killed. These were dedicated men who had made it clear that they would die with their president if necessary, if it came to that.

At the same time, there was widespread destruction in the city of Ramallah, Palestine's provisional capital. Roads and pavements, electricity, water and communication links, trees and buildings, all were smashed. The excuse offered by the Israelis was that they were hunting for wanted individuals. Many people were killed or wounded.

Innocent civilians suffered. The Israelis arrested certain Palestinian officials, including notably Marwan al-Barghouti, under the pretext that he was the instigator of the Intifada and had ordered a number of bombings inside the Green Line. The Israeli occupation forces also looted documents and official papers as well as computers and cameras from the offices of the Palestinian Authority as they were destroyed. They did not even spare such peaceful institutions as the ministries of education and health, the Palestinian Census Centre and the Land Registry. The violence was carried out even more extensively than during the occupation of the West Bank in 1967.

The scene in Bethlehem was no less ugly than in Ramallah. The occupation forces besieged the Church of the Nativity under the pretext that fighters had sought refuge in it. They also burned down the neighbouring Omar Bin al-Khattab mosque. Similar scenes were enacted in Tulkarem and Qalqilya, as well as in Nablus and its old quarters, where holy places were desecrated, homes destroyed and both innocent citizens and freedom fighters were indiscriminately hunted down and arrested. The town of Jenin in the northern West Bank, together with its associated refugee camp, were subjected to especially savage attacks using the heaviest weapons and the air force. Dozens were killed and large areas of the camp were destroyed.

Abu Ammar continued to follow every detail of the Israeli assault from his ravaged headquarters with unflagging spirits. One of the president's guards told me later that when the tanks actually reached his office window, there were two of his men with him. Abu Ammar said, 'Ignore them, they are cowards. They will leave and we will stay.' On another occasion, Abu Ammar took out his own personal handgun and said his intention was to go out into the Muqataa courtyard to fight to the death, but his guards restrained him and brought him back to his office.

During this period in the early days of the invasion of Ramallah and the siege of the Muqataa, I was of course no longer able to travel from my home in Abu Dis to the besieged city as I had been accustomed to doing virtually on a daily basis. I therefore remained in constant telephone contact with Abu Ammar. It astonished me how tirelessly he continued to devote himself to his work in these adverse circumstances. He knew every detail of political developments in our

Palestinian institutions and in Israel, and retained personal control of all key issues, directing military operations, issuing administrative orders and taking policy and financial decisions. He absolutely refused to go to Gaza when he had the chance as this would have meant leaving the Muqataa, which had become a symbol of our sovereignty. To those who tried to persuade him to leave, he said, 'We came back to die on the soil of our homeland and I will not leave again. I will die and be buried in this blessed land.'

These were difficult days for the Palestinian people. This period, when Israel had already begun what appeared to be an organised operation to reoccupy the West Bank, with its militarised incursions into zones that had been declared to be Area A, and were therefore under full Palestinian sovereignty and control, was more dangerous for us than any in our long struggle. Afterwards I recorded in my private papers my own thoughts in relation to these dangerous developments. Here is what I wrote:

The night of 29 March 2002 was the darkest night in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, which officially began on 13 September, 1993 when the PLO and the Israeli government signed the Oslo Accords (the Declaration of Principles) in the American capital, Washington DC. On the night when the Israeli army crossed its last remaining red line by invading the city of Ramallah and the Muqataa complex, the headquarters of the Palestinian president, Yasser Arafat, the peace process completely collapsed, and its remaining validity was lost. President Arafat was held under siege in his office for more than a month. The Israeli army also occupied Bethlehem and besieged the Church of the Nativity. In addition, they moved into other Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps. The Israeli army reoccupied parts of Area A which were under full Palestinian security control under the transitional agreement signed by the Palestinian and Israeli sides on 28 September 1995, with all the dangerous implications of such an act.

'Operation Defensive Shield', the name the Israelis gave to their wide-reaching military operation in the West Bank, was not a small operation. It was a comprehensive planned attack virtually amounting to a sixth war in the series of conflicts witnessed by the Middle East since the events of 1948 in Palestine. There were two reasons to describe it in this way. First, there was the scale of the forces involved and the nature of the weapons

used by Israel. Second, the long-term aims of the operation exceeded its declared tactical goal, which was to destroy what Israel claimed was the infrastructure of terror.

'Operation Defensive Shield' alarmed the Arab and Islamic countries and peoples. It caused international concern because it went beyond the bounds of the relationship provided for by the peace agreements. It was a demonstration to the world that, without doubt, the aims of the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon were to destroy the fledgling Palestinian entity and to impede the establishment of an independent Palestinian state such as had been internationally agreed to be crucial for real security and stability in the region.

What the Israeli army accomplished in the course of this operation was the comprehensive annihilation of all Palestinian Authority institutions pertaining to security and civil matters, together with the obliteration of the institutions, economy and infrastructure of Palestinian civil society. The intention was to break the will of the Palestinian people, to humiliate them and to dash their hopes; they placed the entire Palestinian people under curfew and intruded into every Palestinian household. While all this was taking place, blatant war crimes were committed, for example at the Jenin refugee camp, the Old City in Nablus and in other Palestinian areas.

Israel's current policy of freezing the peace process and imposing these security measures will lead to yet more violence and tension because of the feelings of depression and despair that it has stirred up in the Palestinian people, who are living through a period of racist humiliation and increased poverty owing to the Israeli siege and closures.

The Middle East today sits on a powder keg which could blow up at any moment, especially because the extremists on both sides, and particularly in the Israeli government, are able to impose their own agenda on the peoples of the region. What we are witnessing, owing to this, is a dangerous turning point in the nature of the conflict; it is being transformed from a Palestinian-Israeli conflict into an Arab-Israeli conflict and even an Islamic-Israeli conflict, the latter being the most dangerous point we can reach.

Today, faced by this dangerous situation, surrender is not acceptable. It is vital for international and regional efforts to succeed so that we can emerge from the current crisis through a process of objective evaluation and a true analysis of what lies behind it. We should learn from experience and move towards creating the necessary conditions for a final solution and the establishment of a just, comprehensive and

permanent peace in the Middle East, which will enable the people and countries of the region to live in security and stability.

The key questions are: why have events taken such a dangerous turn? Is there a solution to the problem or not? Will our will break first or theirs? What is truly taking place after the failure of the second Camp David summit in this confrontation between the Israeli army, armed to the hilt with modern weaponry, and the unarmed Palestinian people?

Finally, despite all that has happened, is there a solution? How could it be achieved practically? What is being proposed regionally and internationally? What are the opinions of each side? And in the case of an agreement being reached, what are the chances of success? How could it be protected? What would be the roles of the parties concerned and their legislative and executive institutions, and the institutions of civil society? What will the future of the region be? And what consequences would a solution have on the security and stability of the region and on world peace?

At the end of September 2000, after the failure of Camp David, it was easy to predict that there would be an explosion. The peace process was in danger and the mood of depression and despair on the Palestinian street had reached its low point. These were the same people who, seven years ago, had warmly welcomed the Oslo Accords but had feared that Israel had not abandoned the culture of force and its underlying idea of expansion and occupation. What our people subsequently experienced was the continuation of Israel's policy of consolidating its occupation through settlement activity and the intensive Judaisation of occupied Jerusalem. This added to the humiliation felt by the Palestinian population as a result of the policy of collective punishment continued with unprecedented vigour by Israeli governments after the Oslo Accords.

Meanwhile, the Israeli street had been recruited by Israel's political right wing against the peace agreement and against any repetition of what the right wing called 'Barak's generous compromises' at the Camp David summit. This meant the Israeli people were prepared to accept whatever measures their government might take against the Palestinian people.

This loaded atmosphere only needed a single spark to ignite the situation and paralyse the peace process. This came in the form of Ariel Sharon's provocative intrusion into the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, sovereignty over which was an issue that had lain at the heart of the failure of the Camp David summit. What inflamed the situation yet further was the excessive use of force by the occupation forces the following day when they suppressed a demonstration organised by Muslim worshippers in the courtyard of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

In March 2002, as the Palestinians were going through some of their worst days, we in the Palestinian leadership nevertheless did what we could to restore the peace process, continuing our efforts, even while we were under attack by the Israelis, to produce a timetable for the implementation of the Mitchell Report and the Tenet Plan. Our goal was to restore the situation in the Palestinian territories to the way it was before 28 September 2000 and then to move forward from there. Despite all the aggression to which we were subjected, our optimism continued.

On 30 March the Security Council passed Resolution 1402, calling on both parties to cooperate with General Zinni to implement the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell recommendations in the interest of the resumption of peace negotiations. This resolution also called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian cities including Ramallah. We reacted by producing a plan and a timetable.

Our proposal was that the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority would declare once more their commitment to peace and to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and to the full implementation of the Mitchell Report and Tenet Plan recommendations as an indivisible whole. The two sides would also confirm their commitment to the peace proposal formulated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and announced at the Arab League summit in Beirut on 27 March 2002. As will be recalled, this called on the countries of the region to normalise their relations with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in June 1967, including East Jerusalem.

The timetable we drew up began with a cooling off period during which security cooperation would resume. Israel would freeze all settlement activity including that proposed for East Jerusalem. After a week, the Israeli military forces would withdraw to their previous positions and this would be followed by the siege being lifted and military blockades and economic closures ending. Physical barriers between Palestinian cities would be removed and the closed Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem would be reopened, and additional measures would be taken. After four weeks, final status negotiations would resume. A monitoring group made up of representatives of the parties that had

participated in the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in October 2000 would be established.

However, there was to be a new development on the international scene that would fundamentally change the parameters for all future negotiation. On 4 April 2002 the Security Council in its Resolution 1403 provided for the establishment of a 'Quartet', a monitoring body that was to include representatives of the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations itself. This was a hopeful innovation. On the very same day, however, President George W. Bush disappointingly reiterated his assertion that Yasser Arafat was failing to oppose terrorists or confront them reliably, and that he had wasted many chances for peace, letting down the legitimate hopes of the Palestinian people. Once again he put forward the contention, echoing the position of the Israelis, that the Palestinians needed a better leadership, reasserting that, as he put it, Israel had the right to defend itself in the face of terrorism. However, there was some consolation for the Palestinians in the call made by President Bush for the Israeli government to also work for peace and, in particular, to cease its incursions into territories under Palestinian control and begin a withdrawal from the cities it had occupied.

The pro-Israel lobby in the United States objected strongly to the demand that Israel withdraw its forces from the cities of the West Bank. Nevertheless, this call was reaffirmed by President Bush's national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, on 7 April. In Washington, pro-Israeli pressure groups began to lobby against the secretary of state, Colin Powell, who was now being accused of being an enemy of Israel. In the face of this pressure, the administration stopped hinting that Israel might be subject to criticism and on 11 April 2002, the White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, gave the Israeli prime minister praise that he hardly deserved when he said that President Bush saw in Ariel Sharon a 'man of peace'.

5

ISRAEL REOCCUPIES

On 11 April 2002 Colin Powell once more arrived in the region. He had shrugged off the criticism of his apparently too pro-Palestinian stance that had followed his first visit and he seemed more determined than ever to achieve a breakthrough. On 14 April he held talks with President Arafat at his besieged headquarters in Ramallah. Colin Powell asked the Palestinian Authority to take action against the Palestinian militias. Abu Ammar refused to agree to a ceasefire with the current strife between Israel and the Palestinians unless the Israelis pulled out of the reoccupied zones of Area A, and since the Israelis refused to do this, the talks broke up without success. However, Saeb Erakat took the opportunity to underline to the Secretary of State that the Palestinian Authority had lost its ability to act as a result of the Israeli aggression. On 17 April 2002 Colin Powell and Arafat held further lengthy talks at President Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah and, on this occasion, I was present. Abu Ammar headed our delegation, backed by Abu Mazen and a number of other Palestinian officials including me. Accompanying Colin Powell on the American side were William Burns, the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and General Anthony Zinni, whom, of course, we knew well by now from his previous visits, together with the senior American diplomats David Satterfield and Aaron Miller. Ronald Schlicher, the American consul in Jerusalem, was also present.

Abu Ammar spoke at length and with considerable bitterness about recent events. He talked about what was happening at the Church of

the Nativity in Bethlehem, which the Israelis were also besieging, and of Sharon's threat to complete Israel's occupation of the Muqataa. He discussed in detail what was reported from the refugee camp at Jenin, asking whether Jenin deserved to be demolished, as Berlin had been in 1945. Abu Ammar said that he had been very optimistic when President Bush had declared, for the third time, the necessity of a ceasefire. He noted that this had been repeated by the Secretary of State before his arrival in the region and was reinforced by the relevant Security Council resolutions. Addressing Colin Powell, he added, 'Please read the latest statements by General Shaul Mofaz, the Chief of General Staff: they are racist, criminal, dangerous and terrorist. He speaks of the need totally to destroy the dignity and soul of the Palestinians. He forgets that the racist regime in South Africa could not break the spirit of Nelson Mandela, though he was imprisoned for 27 years.'

As Colin Powell took his leave, Abu Ammar thanked him, saying that the meeting had been conducted in a friendly spirit. But he went on to say grimly, 'This might be my last meeting with you.' He added, 'I will defend my last stronghold here even with this simple pistol in my hand.' It was after Colin Powell's return from the Middle East to Washington on 17 April 2002 that the continuing divisions inside Bush's administration began to become yet more evident to us. Before he left Jerusalem, Powell had told journalists that the major obstacle to a ceasefire was the continuing Israeli military campaign. This was in clear contrast to previous American statements emanating from Washington DC which claimed that Palestinian violence was the problem. On 18 April, with Colin Powell sitting next to him in the Oval office, President Bush again chose to praise Ariel Sharon as a 'man of peace', expressing his satisfaction with the speed of the Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, despite Sharon's continuing refusal to pull his troops out of our cities. A State Department official afterwards told the *Washington Post* that he and his colleagues were 'being criticised all over the Arab world because of this phrase'.

Sadly, in reality, Colin Powell's visit in April 2002 did not lead to any significant results on the ground. As soon as the American Secretary of State had left the region, Israel's attacks grew more vicious, both in the West Bank, by now under total Israeli occupation, and in the Gaza Strip. In Gaza, all the bases of the Palestinian

security forces and some Palestinian civil institutions were still being subjected to sustained attack. A profound obstacle to any ceasefire was Israel's insistence that the Palestinian Authority hand over for prosecution anyone suspected of security offences who had taken shelter in the Muqataa, including those accused of killing the Israeli minister of tourism, Rehavam Zeevi. This was a demand the Palestinian Authority absolutely rejected, deeming it humiliating in every respect.

The Palestinian Authority asked the Security Council for an immediate resolution authorising the positioning of international forces in the Palestinian territories and requested that a commission be established to investigate what had taken place. We were not offered an international force, but the UN secretary-general, Kofi Annan, decided to appoint a commission of inquiry. After American diplomatic pressure, however, the Security Council unanimously agreed to describe the commission not as a commission of inquiry but as a fact-finding mission, whose members would be selected by Kofi Annan. The Bush administration had already imposed an alternative text for a resolution in which such words as 'massacre', called for by the Palestinians, were left out. The United States agreed to the amended resolution, and President Bush called for transparency, saying that he 'wanted to see the facts'. We realised that any attempt to pass a stronger resolution would only have brought an American veto. On 19 April 2002, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1405, which expressed anxiety over the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian civilians, emphasised the urgent need to remove restrictions on the work of humanitarian and medical organisations and welcomed the despatch of a fact-finding mission. The Palestinian Authority said it would assist the fact-finding mission in all possible ways. However, the mission was in any case rendered impossible in the end by Israel's failure to cooperate.

Israel's reoccupation of the West Bank had involved attacks across the territory and in most of its cities. Israel's assault on Jenin and the refugee camp situated there on 3 April had been especially protracted. The fighting there continued until 11 April. The Norwegian diplomat Terje Larsen, who was now the United Nations envoy to the region, succeeded in visiting the camp at Jenin on 18 April and made damning

comments on what he saw. He said the camp looked as if it had been struck by an earthquake, with the stench of corpses everywhere. 'What I saw,' he said, 'was unbelievable. This is a sad, shameful chapter in Israel's history.' Initially, Israel attempted to conceal the atrocities committed in the camp. Two teams of independent international observers, from Norway and Switzerland respectively, were prevented from reaching it. Other would-be international observers were not even allowed to land at Lod Airport. The horror of what had happened in Jenin was only fully exposed after Israel began to withdraw from the refugee camp on 21 April 2002.

Kofi Annan had appointed the Finnish ex-president, Martti Ahtisaari, to head the UN fact-finding team, which was also to include Sadako Ogata, the former high commissioner for refugees, and Cornelio Sommaruga, the former president of the International Committee of the Red Cross. A former American general, William Nash, was to act as a military adviser and Peter Fitzgerald, a senior Irish police commissioner, was to serve as an adviser on policing issues. Both of these had worked for the United Nations in the Balkans. Israel initially expressed its willingness to cooperate but Sharon soon began to express misgivings. On 23 April 2002 Israel withdrew its agreement to the mission, claiming that the composition of the team was not what they had agreed to and that its emphasis was more political than military. Sharon and his minister of defence took the view that some of those selected were biased against Israel. Israel also said the members of the team had been chosen without prior consultation with Israel. Sharon insisted the mission should include military and anti-terror experts sympathetic to his point of view, whom he hoped would substantiate Israel's accusations that Jenin was a hotbed of terrorism. By seeking to justify Israel's actions on this basis, it can be argued that Sharon hoped to avoid the Israeli army being accused of acting illegally.

On 24 April 2002, faced with Israel's refusal to cooperate, Kofi Annan agreed to postpone the mission. His spokesman, Fred Eckhard, said that this would offer the opportunity for further consultation but expressed the hope that the team would still be able to begin its work by 27 April. The members of the mission were asked to assemble in Geneva without delay. The Secretary-General said he was prepared to see further members added to the team to satisfy Israel's requirements

but was not prepared to remove any member already appointed. Two further experts joined the team; Tyge Lehmann, a Danish international lawyer and expert on human rights, was appointed as a legal adviser and Helena Ranta of Finland was appointed as a specialist adviser in forensic medicine. This did not satisfy Israel, despite an announcement that a second military expert was expected to join the team. Israel also wanted the former American general William Nash to be a full member rather than a consultant.

The wrangle continued, with Kofi Annan demanding that Israel fulfil its promise to cooperate while sticking to his refusal to remove any members of the team. Israel deliberately played for time, claiming it would be unable to finally decide on whether to allow the mission to start work or not before 28 April when an Israeli cabinet meeting to consider security and political issues would take place. After the meeting, Shimon Peres, Israel's foreign minister, asked Kofi Annan to postpone the mission for a further 24 hours so that the approval of the government could be given. This was the second postponement in a week of manoeuvres that had included frantic telephone calls from the American secretary of state, Colin Powell, to Kofi Annan and the Israeli leaders. On 29 April 2002 Peres met with Annan to seek additional conditions. He asked for further confirmation that the mission would be limited to fact-finding and would not be in practice a commission of inquiry in all but name. He repeated the request for there to be more military members of the team and said Israel wished to control access to those interviewed on the Israeli side, and he demanded that there be a prior commitment that the mission would seek to gather evidence on what he called Palestinian terrorism. Kofi Annan agreed to two more military consultants to assist General Nash: Major François Xavier Thomas of the French army and Britain's Colonel Miles Wade. The Israeli cabinet finally met on 30 April, but, predictably, it expressed yet more reservations.

By 25 April, as these developments were taking place in the field of diplomacy, it had started to seem that the siege of the Muqataa complex in Ramallah would soon be resolved in favour of President Arafat, as the result of an announcement by the United States that it would not tolerate any move by the Israeli army to force its way into the building. This was a source of much relief to the Palestinian leadership and to

the population. America's change of heart was brought about by the diplomatic intervention of Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. Israel's excuse for seeking to complete its operation against the Muqataa had been nominally that it needed to arrest those accused of the murder of the minister of tourism, Rehavam Zeevi. This was undermined on 25 April when a Palestinian military court sentenced the three accused. Hamdi Qaraan was given eighteen years with hard labour, Basil Al-Asmar was sentenced to twelve years and Majdi Hussein Arheimer to eight years. An accomplice, Aahid Ghulma was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. Of course, this was insufficient for the Israelis. Sharon said the trial was little more than a theatrical display, insinuating the accused would soon be released. He repeated the demand for the accused men to be handed over to Israel. Nevertheless, the Israeli case had been significantly weakened. Israel agreed that it would be satisfactory if the United States and Britain were to monitor the imprisonment of those convicted in a Palestinian prison. Certain Palestinian factions, however, criticised the decision to agree to international observation of the imprisonment of the convicted men.

On 28 April, just three days after the completion of this trial, the lifting of the siege of the Muqataa complex was announced. The White House stated that Israel had also agreed to restore freedom of movement to President Arafat and in due course to withdraw entirely from Ramallah. However, the agreement to end the siege on President Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah did not bring Israel's operation in the Palestinian areas to an end. Bethlehem remained under siege, with no solution in sight to the problem of those confined in the Church of the Nativity. In addition, on 29 April 2002 Israeli troops invaded Hebron as a result of an attack on Jewish settlers close to Hebron in which four settlers were killed and six were wounded. Nine martyrs fell and tens of other Palestinians were wounded as a result of the Israeli invasion of Hebron. Mass arrests were carried out in the city.

Meanwhile, in the field of security, Israel took a fateful step. The Israeli government decided to take action to maintain its security by creating buffer zones between Israel and the Palestinian territories at the expense of Palestinian land. On 29 April Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, the Israeli minister of defence, announced that a fence, initially some

90 km long, was to be built between the West Bank and Israel. This became known as the 'separation wall'. Sharon decided in due course to extend the wall to surround Israel's entire territory, in an operation that was scheduled to be undertaken over two years, with the wall to be built within Palestinian land. In addition to this, Israel would separate the Palestinian areas from one another and isolate them into eight cantons between which residents would only be allowed to move with the permission of the Israeli administration. As I shall later explain, I subsequently became involved in efforts to obtain a ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague that would rule that the 'separation wall' was illegal.

On 1 May 2002, at the request of the Arab group at the United Nations, the Security Council discussed the situation that had resulted from Israel's apparent reluctance in practice to cooperate with Kofi Annan's fact-finding mission. The Arab group examined the possibility of a resolution criticising Israel's response to the Secretary-General's plan. Kofi Annan said that the United Nations had done all it could to respond to Israel's concerns. Kieran Prendergast, his political affairs assistant, told journalists that he was, 'leaning towards disbanding the team because it seems from the statement of the Israeli cabinet that the difficulties that face the deployment of the team will not be resolved soon' and that he had conveyed this to the Security Council. He added that, 'in the Secretary-General's opinion, a comprehensive, balanced and trustworthy report about the events in Jenin refugee camp will not be possible without the full co-operation of the Israeli government.'

On 2 May 2002 the President of the Security Council suggested that he himself should write to Kofi Annan thanking him for his efforts to set up the fact-finding mission and asking him to examine the information that was already available concerning the events at Jenin and the refugee camp there in order to write an accurate and comprehensive report. The Arab delegates and the Palestinian representative, however, said that the situation required the Security Council to take a stronger stand and asked instead for a full debate on a resolution. They also suggested that if the Security Council did not act then the issue would be brought before the General Assembly. The head of the Palestinian observer mission at the UN, Nasser al-Qudwa, said that the idea of a letter 'did not reflect the danger of

the situation and the reality that a UN member state had disregarded a Security Council resolution and refused to co-operate with the Secretary General.' The Secretary-General told the Security Council that the cooperation of both sides was essential and more than that 'time was also a determining factor'.

On 2 May, in a separate international initiative, the Quartet, the recently formed body that included representatives of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared that it would attempt to convene an international conference on the conflict in the summer of 2002. Colin Powell reiterated that the Quartet's goal was to reach a final settlement in as short a time as possible. The American secretary of state Powell described the Quartet's immediate strategy as the re-establishment of security for both sides and the strengthening of the Palestinian security services, together with the provision of humanitarian and economic aid for the Palestinians. This would prepare the ground for negotiations aimed at a swift and definitive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

However, despite the announcement of such initiatives as these, American policy continued to appear confused. The position of the United States regarding the prospect of an international conference was expressed at various times by different spokesmen in ways that were sometimes contradictory. The same indecision was observable in their stated attitude towards President Arafat. The White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, repeated that President Bush took the view that Sharon was obliged to negotiate with Yasser Arafat since Arafat was the president of the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Condoleezza Rice, the national security adviser at the White House, said in a television interview, that in her view the current Palestinian leadership was not 'the right one' to establish a Palestinian state. Meanwhile, President Bush himself continued to speak of his disappointment with Arafat, just as the Israelis did. This lack of consistency appeared to stem from whether the State Department or the Pentagon had the President's ear at a particular time. In addition, such confusion often appeared to reflect differences of opinion within the American administration involving individuals sometimes at quite junior levels. The *Washington Post* had been reporting since 26 April

2002 that officials in the State Department believed that the failure of their efforts had to do with the obstacles put in their way by the secretary for defence, Donald Rumsfeld, and his staff. The newspaper said, 'This challenge to the efforts of the State Department accounts for the reason for Bush's administration's failure to stand by Powell during his last trip to the Middle East when he was attempting to put pressure on the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, to withdraw his troops and resume peace negotiations with Yasser Arafat.'

Not only was the position of the American administration confused, but messages were also emerging from the American legislature which contradicted the more sympathetic stance of the State Department. The hawks at the Pentagon were apparently supported by pro-Israeli congressmen and the Jewish American lobby. President Bush was easily persuaded to listen to such views. On 2 May 2002, while the row at the United Nations about the prospective fact-finding mission was continuing, both houses of the United States Congress adopted resolutions in support of Israel, giving their approval to the military occupation of the Palestinian cities of the West Bank and declaring their full solidarity with Israel in 'the common struggle against terror', together with a condemnation of President Arafat. The support for both motions was overwhelming and bipartisan. There could be no doubt of the strength of the support for Israel offered by America's legislators. In due course, the congressional subcommittee on budget affairs resolved to offer Israel more aid, to the value of \$200 million, to contribute to its campaign 'against terror'. President Bush, despite the opposition of some of his own officials in the White House and the State Department, signed the resolution.

At the United Nations, meanwhile, Kofi Annan finally disbanded the UN fact-finding mission on 3 May 2002, having concluded that Israel's lack of will to cooperate would make the work of such a fact-finding team impossible. The Security Council began instead to consider a draft resolution tabled by Syria and Tunisia in which they asked the Secretary-General to send at least a fact-finding body to Jenin, regardless of whether Israel agreed to cooperate or not, demanding that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority agree the mission should go ahead. This was withdrawn when it

became clear that it would not attract a sufficient number of votes and would in any case face the very real possibility of a veto by the United States.

On 7 May 2002 on the ground, there was a further setback for peace when 16 Israelis were killed and dozens wounded in a bomb attack at a billiards club in Rishon LeZion, which was patronised largely by older Israelis. This happened while Ariel Sharon was in Washington to meet George W. Bush. He cut his visit short and returned immediately to Israel to chair a security meeting. Israel's response, which was frankly not the most rational, was to make preparations to invade the Gaza Strip. Reservists were called up and large-scale Israeli armed forces were mobilised on the borders with Gaza, awaiting the order to move in. On 8 May, Yasser Arafat attempted to head off Israel's plan by going on Palestinian television to announce that he had ordered the Palestinian security forces to 'stop any terrorist attacks aimed at Israeli civilians by any Palestinian faction, no matter whom.' In his statement he said, 'As the president of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, I repeat my commitment to the war against terror and my participation in it alongside the United States and the international community.' The American administration welcomed President Arafat's statement as positive, but added that, as Washington saw it, 'President Arafat also has to show that he is in fact capable of ruling.'

Sharon was warned on all sides about the potentially harmful consequences of invading Gaza. The White House called on Israel not to forget its responsibility towards the peace process, though the moment was fraught and emotional. Within Israel, some, including the leader of the Meretz opposition party, Yossi Sarid, warned that the result of going into Gaza would be like what had happened in Jenin refugee camp but on a vastly greater scale. The former military commander of the southern region, General Yom-Tov Samia, warned that the army would face a much worse situation than it had in Jenin if it were to enter the refugee camps in Gaza, and that more Israeli soldiers would be killed. Egypt's foreign minister, Ahmed Maher, also counselled Israel against a military attack on Gaza. This concerted pressure, and especially that from the Americans, had its effect, leading Israel to shelve its plans for a military assault on Gaza. The Saudi foreign minister, Saud al-Faisal, praised the United States

for urging restraint, adding that Washington seemed at last to be seizing control, which could lead to the continuation of the peace process and a return to the negotiating table. In the midst of these developments, a further encouraging sign was that an agreement was at last reached to lift the siege on the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Thirteen of the Palestinians who had sought sanctuary there would be exiled to Europe, 26 would be moved to Gaza, and 85 civilians and members of the security forces not sought by the Israelis would be released.

On 11 May, in a further attempt to create a favourable atmosphere for the resumption of the peace process, a tripartite Arab summit was held in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh in the Sinai Peninsula. Those present were Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The communiqué from this summit reiterated the desire for peace of the Arab states involved and their rejection of violence in all its forms, while their support was expressed for the Palestinian people in what the statement called their steadfastness and resistance. On 12 May the Saudi newspaper *al-Watan* reported that Prince Abdullah had taken the opportunity of this meeting to brief the Egyptian and Syrian leaders concerning a US–Saudi agreement which committed both parties to political efforts to halt acts of violence between Palestinians and Israelis, and the resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Meanwhile, in Israel on 13 May a 'Peace Now' demonstration attracted around 100,000 demonstrators in Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. On the same day, by contrast, the Likud party voted overwhelmingly to oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state. Political analysts in Israel commented that this decision did not reflect the opinion of the vast majority of Israelis, or even that of many Likud supporters. Nevertheless, the move provoked a wave of reaction across the region and the international arena against what was seen as arrogance on the part of Likud and Ariel Sharon.

In May 2002 the Israeli press published the text of a document prepared by Shimon Peres and said his intention was to present it to a Labour Party meeting in July 2002 for approval and adoption by his party as a political programme. As with the leaked document that had been published in February, this document was almost identical to the

statement of principles that we had been calling the Abu Ala-Peres Document, but with the insertion of a reference to the Quartet and its prospective role in negotiation. As the text said, 'In order to give the negotiations status and encourage confidence in their success, an additional partner should be involved in addition to Israel and the Palestinians. The proposal is that this partner should be the Quartet (that is, the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations).' The Israeli Labour Party, under the leadership of Shimon Peres, did in fact adopt the basic principles of this document, using them as the basis for a peace initiative that would be part of the Labour platform for the next Israeli parliamentary elections. The text of this plan, which was basically the so-called 'Abu Ala-Peres Document' as Peres and I had discussed it, is to be found in Appendix 1.

In June 2002 the persistent indecision that pervaded American policy was further underlined when the White House appeared to directly contradict efforts that were being made at the time on the diplomatic front. On 24 June President Bush seemed to be following the line laid down by Israel's backers in Congress, when he declared in an important speech in Washington DC that he no longer regarded Yasser Arafat as a legitimate leader. In this speech, in which he reviewed what he called his 'vision' for a peace agreement based on two states, the American President said that reaching such a peace required 'a new and different Palestinian leadership', demanding that the Palestinian people 'elect new leaders, leaders whose reputation was not marred by terrorism'. Bush made this new leadership a condition for American support for a new Palestinian state. In this speech, President Bush spoke for the first time about what he called a roadmap for Middle East peace, a plan based essentially on the Mitchell Report which would later become American policy.

In the wake of this speech, the United States once more began demands that the structure of the Palestinian leadership be changed. It was at this time that we first began to hear calls for the appointment of a prime minister who would be responsible to the Palestinian Legislative Council rather than to the president, in what seemed to be a clear effort to weaken the authority of President Arafat. President Bush's unprecedented criticism of Abu Ammar at that time seemed to echo the constant denigration of President Arafat by the Israeli

leadership and in particular by Prime Minister Sharon, who tirelessly strove to draw a parallel between Yasser Arafat and the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden.

Nevertheless, on 16 July 2002, little more than three weeks after President Bush's speech, Colin Powell held talks in New York with the other representatives of the Quartet to discuss how to support Palestinian reforms intended to facilitate the establishment of a Palestinian state within three years. The Secretary of State went on to hold meetings with the foreign ministers of Arab countries sympathetic to the United States, the primary purpose of which was also to support the Palestinian reforms. On 18 September 2002 the Quartet endorsed the principles of Bush's roadmap and adopted it as its preferred plan for the future.

In October 2002 I had another opportunity to discuss the range of issues involved in the Middle East peace process with Shimon Peres. The prime minister of Sweden, Göran Persson, who had already lent a hand in Middle East peace negotiations at an earlier stage at meetings held in Stockholm in 2000, asked Peres and me to come to the Swedish capital to participate in the Swedish Social Democratic Party congress in Stockholm. We each made a speech before the delegates, Peres in his capacity as the Israeli foreign minister and I as the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly. However, Peres and I were also able to hold a further extended discussion of the 'Abu Ala-Peres Document', along with Gorän Persson. In an interview with Swedish radio, Peres confirmed that our talks had been useful. At that time, Sweden held the presidency of the European Union so these talks were also an opportunity to bring our ideas to the attention of Europe. At the end of the month, Peres left the Israeli government when Labour pulled out of Sharon's coalition.

In November 2002, though Israel was continuing to exert unprecedeted pressure on the Palestinian Authority, Ariel Sharon's government had its own internal difficulties. The departure of the Labour Party from Sharon's coalition on 30 October led to a desperate search for new partners. Sharon failed to attract extreme right-wing parties into his coalition and had to turn to his old rivals within Likud for help. The reappointment on 5 November of Binyamin Netanyahu as foreign minister, with General Shaul Mofaz as defence minister,

virtually closed off communication between the Palestinian Authority and Sharon's government. Netanyahu's condition for a return to government was the holding of early elections. On 5 November, the same day that Netanyahu rejoined him, Sharon finally recognised, despite his personal popularity in the opinion polls, that without Labour he was going to be unable to construct a viable coalition in the Knesset. He announced the holding of new elections, which were scheduled for February 2003.

Within the Palestinian Authority, we began, in the new situation, to seek alternative channels of communication with the Israelis, looking to re-establish links with our old interlocutors. On 13 November, in my capacity as Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, I again sought out Shimon Peres and I also arranged to meet Yossi Beilin, the ex-minister of justice. The aim was to discuss potential ways to halt Israel's military escalation in the Palestinian territories and the possibility of cooperation between reasonable people on both sides to overcome the current crisis. The urgent need was to stop the right-wing Israeli leadership, which now included both Sharon and Netanyahu, from encouraging each other to spill more Palestinian blood. Our goal was to end if possible the cycle of violence that had already cost the lives of so many people on both sides.

Yossi Beilin is rightly celebrated as an enthusiast for peace and coexistence between Israel and the Palestinians, and has never failed to do everything in his power to keep the Palestinians informed of developments and events in Israel. Now, as always, he showed himself willing to turn his hand to the mitigation of the worsening crisis. I gave Beilin a graphic account of the consequences of Israel's continued aggression against the Palestinian population, in particular the suffering people were experiencing in Palestinian cities and villages. We also discussed the specific problem of the Israeli government's refusal to pay the revenues due to the Palestinian Authority according to the commitments that had already been agreed to. Beilin said he would exert what influence he had to bring about a return to the negotiating table and to break the cycle of violence.

Soon after my latest meetings with Peres and Beilin, Ariel Sharon suddenly made an announcement which caused us some surprise. On 4 December 2002, at the annual conference in the Israeli coastal city

of Herzliya held by the Israeli Institute for Policy and Strategy, in contradiction to all his previous expressed opposition to the idea of a Palestinian state, Sharon implied that a state of Palestine was not merely desirable but had become a reality. He declared his readiness to embrace the roadmap, with its implicit recognition of Palestine. As always, when he perceived that he needed to accommodate the wishes of the United States, he was ready to give at least the appearance of doing so. He was well aware that President Bush's commitment to the roadmap was genuine. However, it may be assumed that Sharon continued as always to plan to evade the implementation of any commitment that did not suit him.

His acceptance of the roadmap was also accompanied, as was Sharon's habit, with a personal attack on the integrity of Abu Ammar and a demand that he should be removed from the Palestinian leadership. The text of this speech is in Appendix 1. At the same time, Binyamin Netanyahu, newly installed as foreign minister, explicitly vowed that were he to become prime minister in Sharon's stead he would go further and actually expel President Arafat from the territory of Palestine. In an interview I gave to the Israeli press, I commented that the new Israeli troika of Ariel Sharon, backed by Shaul Mofaz and Binyamin Netanyahu, evidently intended to continue the policy of demonstrating Israel's invincibility by committing further crimes against the Palestinian people. I also took the opportunity to repeat my plea that the only viable way forward for the two sides lay in a return to the negotiating table.

The date by which the United States had committed itself to implementing the roadmap had been mid-December 2002, but as the time approached Colin Powell, realising that the situation in Israel had changed, declared that Washington wanted a delay until after the next Israeli elections in February 2003. It would be wiser, he added, to continue for the moment to 'refine the modalities of the plan'. We were disappointed, as we had already received a draft of the roadmap and our negotiating committee had begun to discuss it in detail. Meanwhile, it began to appear that the Quartet had delegated to the British government the task of overseeing the reform of Palestinian institutions and putting to us the crucial proposal that we should institute the totally new position of prime minister, to be answerable to our President and work

alongside him, taking responsibility for many administrative functions. The British foreign minister, Jack Straw, said in late 2002 that he wanted to call a meeting in London, to be attended by the British prime minister, Tony Blair, with the participation of the members of the Quartet, which would be dedicated to the implementation of Palestinian reform. The British government announced that the meeting would be held on 13–14 January 2003. We welcomed this as a move in the right direction, though we were disappointed that the emphasis would not be on a timetable for the resumption of negotiations. The British issued an invitation to the Palestinian Authority, which we accepted. However, Sharon's government refused the Palestinian delegation permission to travel to London to attend.

The result was the London meeting to discuss Palestinian reform went ahead without a Palestinian presence. The Quartet and the Arab nations were represented at a high level. The American assistant secretary of state, William Burns, attended, together with Javier Solana and Terje Larsen representing the United Nations, and Andre Vodovin, the Russian Middle East envoy. Omar Sulayman, Egypt's intelligence minister, and representatives of Saudi Arabia and Jordan were also there. We were obliged to give our input via a video link from the assembly hall of the Legislative Council in Ramallah. As Jack Straw noted at the close of the meeting, the Palestinian Authority agreed to rewrite the Palestinian constitution, which would now include the new position of prime minister. He gave the Palestinian Authority full credit for the progress it had made in economic and financial reforms. Though he called on Israel not to put obstacles in the way of the Palestinian Authority, this appeared to us to be hypocritical, as the other participants in the conference had not seen fit to make any strenuous objection to the manner in which Israel had prevented the Palestinian delegation from coming to London for the meeting.

In February 2003 the planned elections took place in Israel and, having once more been victorious, as the opinion polls had predicted, Sharon formed a new government. Sharon lost no time in adding his voice to the demands that the Palestinians choose a prime minister, who he clearly saw as a substitute for President Arafat and a successor to him. The Israeli vision of the future, as expressed at this stage, was that

Palestinian institutions would be comprehensively reformed before a state within provisional borders was declared. This would be followed by a final phase in which what he called Palestinian terrorism would be eliminated, and then an agreement on final borders would be reached. In early March, Colin Powell said the inauguration of the roadmap would now have to wait for what he called, 'the new dynamic that will be created by the appointment of a Palestinian Prime Minister who has real authority'. President Bush endorsed this statement, adding that the roadmap would be presented to Israel and the Palestinian Authority as soon as a Palestinian prime minister took office. I was asked to meet Ariel Sharon to discuss these issues and on 5 February 2003 I went once more to his Negev ranch.

At this meeting with Sharon, what caught my attention was that on a personal level, he seemed to be making an effort to be friendly towards me. He recalled our earlier encounters and wondered aloud about the reason why I had at one time absented myself for a period from the sphere of bilateral communications. He said to me, 'Whenever people speak about you, and some of them criticise you, I tell them the secret of our relationship is that you are the grandson of a shepherd who raised goats and herded them.' I turned the conversation round to the reasons for my present visit and spoke to him about the current situation, emphasising that what we had both experienced in the past two years should have shown that force would not be enough to guarantee Israel security and that violence would not obtain a state for the Palestinians. 'This is why negotiations are the way out, and security will follow after that,' I pointed out. I also spoke to him about the opinions he had expressed about Abu Ammar, saying, 'I know your relationship with President Arafat is bad but you have to understand that Arafat is a precondition of this process, he cannot be superseded or be called irrelevant. The state of siege he is now under is unacceptable.' Sharon replied that Arafat could travel anywhere, but that, the moment he left the Muqataa, Israel would arrest Tawfiq al-Teerawi, the head of the Palestinian secret services, and the leaders of the Palestinian special forces unit known as Force 17.

During these bilateral talks, Sharon exuded a great personal distaste for Abu Ammar. He laid great stress on the need to put in place an alternative Palestinian leadership, saying,

Arafat's strategic resource has been terror, and this is why real control has to be in the hands of a Prime Minister with Arafat relegated to symbolic status. He has to be distanced from the various security services, as these have become in his hands instruments of terrorism. He also has to relinquish his control over finance, and for this reason he has to appoint a Prime Minister, whom we suggest should be designated chief executive officer and take responsibility for several ministries which have to include security and finance.

Sharon went on to lay out detailed proposals. On the Palestinian security forces, he said that instead of the twelve separate services that currently existed, there should be no more than three, led by a single official. He asked us to select a security chief with no connection to past activities regarded by Israel as terrorism, who would be subject to the control of the Minister of the Interior. On finance, he said he wanted to meet our finance minister, Salam Fayyad. He said he wanted the Palestinian Authority to cease to condone incitement to attacks on Israel, which could be achieved through education if there were a minister for education committed to peace. He said Israel wanted to see real reform on the constitution and the judiciary. There must be a prime minister in addition to the president, and a government committed to reform and to elections. Sharon said that this was what the Americans wanted and the Russians were also beginning to favour such an arrangement.

Sharon added that the necessary changes should be implemented in phases, on lines similar to those he had proposed over the years. Any phase, once carried out, should be impossible to reverse. Israel had not sought the current situations in Jenin, Nablus and Bethlehem, he said, but had been obliged to react to the problem of suicide bombers from all factions, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). He said that Israel did not want to stay in Jenin or Nablus but had no other response to the problem available to it. Because of the Israeli presence in these places, wrongdoers could be sought and arrests made. This was Israel's aim, rather than the deaths of civilians. The interrogation of those arrested had allowed Israel's security services to break up whole networks of what he called terrorists. He told me that of the weapons handed in to the Palestinian police under the initial

implementation of the Oslo Accords, no less than 147 had been found later in the hands of would-be suicide bombers. His suggestion as to the phases by which progress could be made were, first, the cessation of terror, and second, a transitional phase in which we would continue our fight against terror with arrests, prosecutions and the destruction of terrorist organisations, as well as the collection of weapons and the destruction of the weapon-making industry. After this, in a third phase, negotiations could begin.

At the end of this discussion, I repeated to Sharon that no serious progress could be made without President Arafat so if his position remained that Arafat had to be removed, progress would be very difficult. We had to begin, I said, at the beginning, with the building of trust. But Sharon insisted on his position towards Abu Ammar, saying, 'We do not see Arafat as a partner in these negotiations, but we will not physically harm him.'

6

ABU MAZEN AS PRIME MINISTER

We come now to a momentous change in the organisation of our Palestinian political system. In early 2003, faced with concerted pressure from Israel and the United States, and conscious of the need to maintain the peace process, the Palestinian leadership took the decision to introduce a new tier into our administration with the appointment of a prime minister, as we had agreed in principle at the London conference. Washington had made the creation of the post of prime minister a pivotal condition for continuing its involvement in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. This was a solution to the problem presented by the insistent demand of Ariel Sharon that Arafat should be sidelined. Sharon had never made a secret of his desire to remove President Arafat. It might even be said that he was obsessed with Arafat. It was in part this obsession that was responsible for the state of siege Sharon had imposed on our leader in Ramallah, when, as we have described, Sharon surrounded Arafat's base at the Muqataa with Israeli tanks, turning his offices into a prison, cutting off at times even supplies of food and water and denying Abu Ammar the medicine and medical treatment he needed. This put our president's life in danger and may have contributed to his death, which was alas to follow only too soon after these events.

Sharon had long searched for a way to settle accounts with Arafat, ever since he and Arafat had fought on opposite sides in the Lebanese Civil War. Rumours circulated that he had considered and rejected

the idea of a targeted assassination (as suggested in a *New York Times* article of 24 April 2004), which would have brought down international opprobrium on his head. He pondered the alternative possibility of seizing Arafat and physically removing him from the territory, leaving him in some far-flung spot where a local despot could agree to detain him. Finally, Sharon decided he could achieve the result he desired by simply boycotting Arafat. His plan was to ignore Arafat's existence, and persuade the Americans to ignore him as well. Sharon's intention was that Arafat would become a non-person, a ghost and an irrelevance to the supposed peace process, with which the Americans remained determined to continue despite Sharon's preference that it be quietly forgotten.

It was against this background that the idea emerged in Washington and Jerusalem that the appointment of a Palestinian prime minister, who would head the Palestinian Authority, would remove an important part of President Arafat's authority. The White House justified such a reform on philosophical grounds, asserting that it would be more democratic than the current presidential system. As for the Israelis, they said that they would prefer to deal with a Palestinian prime minister with standing and powers similar to those of the prime minister of Israel. This would allow Sharon to negotiate personally with a Palestinian counterpart without having to meet Arafat. We suspected that Sharon simply wanted an excuse to not ever have to face Abu Ammar directly across the negotiating table, not just because of his long-standing personal dislike of him but also because he was aware that Arafat was an intransigent and difficult negotiator. Arafat had shown great stubbornness in talks with past Israeli leaders: first with Rabin, then Netanyahu, and finally at Camp David, where he had refused to capitulate to pressure from Ehud Barak and President Clinton.

Back in 1993, after the 1993 Declaration of Principles that emerged from the Oslo talks, we had chosen a different constitutional path by establishing a presidential system. As we saw it, the president, who would be directly elected by the people, would govern, presiding over a Palestinian Authority that would consist of a cabinet of ministers in charge of an administrative apparatus. The ministers would be responsible to the president. However, the Palestinian Authority

would also be monitored by the elected Palestinian Legislative Council, which would be independent of the president and could call the Palestinian Authority to account for its policies and actions. The Legislative Council would be headed by its own president (or 'speaker'). The ministers chosen by the president would in general be drawn from the elected Legislative Council, though some could be co-opted. We decided that the elections for the Legislative Council should be separate and distinct from the elections for the presidency. In due course the Legislative Council was to evolve into a body with growing authority, which began to criticise the executive decision of ministers and increasingly took on the nature of an effective parliamentary body. I like to think that my own role as Speaker from 1996 played some part in these developments.

It was understood from the start that our founding president would be Yasser Arafat who was the head and founder of Fatah and the Chairman of the PLO, and whose acceptance as the leader of the Palestinian people was virtually universal. In the event, when the time for elections came in 1996, a Palestinian activist, Samiha Khalil, also ran for president, but Abu Ammar was nevertheless elected with a majority of 88 per cent. Abu Ammar derived his legitimacy from his historic struggle and he now had a mandate directly from the people. He was not simply someone selected from a list of candidates who had chosen to run for office, as was the right of any citizen. For us, he was a leader with unique charisma who had led his people single-handed through our long period of exile and legitimate revolutionary struggle. It seemed to us that this gave him the right to be our leader, and to preside at last over the establishment of a political regime in the territory of Palestine that had in effect been designed specifically for him. The presidential system we had created fitted him perfectly as a leader who had, over many decades, taken all responsibility, privilege and authority into his own hands. At the outset, we simply had not seen that there was any necessity for a prime minister.

On the other hand, despite our having chosen this path, one could say that with hindsight the idea of a prime minister was not entirely alien to us. We were already aware that it could be convincingly argued that our political system needed change to introduce greater

accountability. Before international pressure began to be brought to bear, there had already been concern over the democratic credentials of our system in some Palestinian circles. In this context, changes such as the appointment of a prime minister were already being discussed. In August 2002 a group of members of the Fatah Central Council sent a memorandum to Abu Ammar in which they suggested that the Palestinian institutions should take 'constitutional steps to appoint a Prime Minister.' As it was put in this document, 'This would be a step that would help to prevent the American administration from making false allegations against us. It would also assist the Palestinian Authority to re-establish its position in the international political arena and to regain its position as the safeguard against the dangers surrounding our people.' The memorandum continued, 'We see Abu Mazen as the best person to fill this post for political, party and historical reasons.'

To go back even further than Oslo, I should point out that the idea of creating the post of prime minister had first made its appearance even before our return to the homeland was a prospect, when Palestinian independence was unilaterally declared and the State of Palestine was proclaimed at the Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting in Algiers on 15 November 1988. A group of independent members of the PNC were at that time enthusiastic supporters of the formation of a government with a separation of powers between the position of president of the state and that of prime minister of the government. The same topic was discussed in depth in Tunis in April 1989, when a meeting of the Fatah Central Council that was also attended by representatives of the PFLP and the DFLP elected Abu Ammar as the president of Palestine. There was a heated discussion about the possibility of establishing the position of prime minister, which would have been a way to moderate the power of the president. The appointment of a vice-president was also discussed. The subject came up again in 1994 when the Palestinian Authority was established, when some Palestinian figures once more advocated the creation of the post of prime minister, with powers separate from those of the president.

However, when the moment came in 2003 to make the change, the addition of the position of prime minister to our constitutional arrangements was a jolt to the system. It was very much a new

departure for us and we found it difficult to come to terms with an arrangement that would, on the face of it, simply have the effect of detracting from the powers of our honoured president. Abu Ammar himself expressed misgivings about the change, casting doubt on its benefits. It was scarcely surprising that he was less than enthusiastic for a change that could only limit his powers. He wondered aloud in front of different foreign envoys as well as leaders and officials from various parts of the Palestinian movement whether taking such a step would in reality help to mitigate the American bias in favour of Israel and if it would in practice help to put a stop to the attacks that had now gone on for over two years. Or, alternatively, would it simply make it easier for Sharon to implement his plan to destroy the Palestinian Authority, get rid of its leadership entirely and force the Palestinians to surrender? We were well aware that Sharon had thrown his weight behind the idea and had announced in advance his readiness to work with a new Palestinian prime minister. This raised suspicions among the Palestinian public.

Abu Mazen, on the other hand, was from the outset in broad agreement with the idea of establishing a prime ministerial system. He was serving at the time as Secretary of the Executive Committee of the PLO, and was seen from the start as the most likely candidate for the post, once the expected constitutional amendment had been enacted. In a press conference he gave on the eve of his appointment, Abu Mazen decried the suggestion that the creation of the post of prime minister was solely the result of international pressure and insisted that it was a Palestinian initiative, saying 'I reject any American or Israeli deal over the identity of the Prime Minister.' He also condemned Hamas's contemptuous description of the prospective prime minister as the 'Karzai of Palestine', and denounced any attempt to create a post of vice-president for Yasser Arafat, adding that in his view any attempt to limit Abu Ammar's political role would mean an end to the Palestinian Authority itself. Farouq al-Qaddoumi (Abu al-Lutuf) also entered the internal debate on the affair. Speaking from the PLO headquarters in Tunis, he declared that in his view the appointment of a Palestinian prime minister would be a 'diversionary step' and that he refused to describe it as a reform. When he was asked why Abu Ammar had apparently accepted the appointment of a prime minister

he answered by casting doubt on whether Abu Ammar had acted on his own volition. 'What do you expect,' he added, 'from a man who is imprisoned in the way Abu Ammar is?'

On 14 February 2003 President Arafat instructed the Central Council of the PLO and the Palestinian Legislative Council to ratify the necessary steps to create the position of prime minister. This agreement came after a number of visits by diplomats to the Muqataa in Ramallah. The final push seemed to have been given by a mission comprising three senior representatives of the Quartet. These were the Russian envoy, Andre Vodovin, the European Union envoy to the region, Miguel Moratinos and the United Nations special envoy, Terje Larsen. On 10 March 2003, after careful drafting of an amendment to the Palestinian Basic Law, the position of prime minister came into existence. On the same day, President Arafat nominated Abu Mazen to the post and his appointment was ratified by the Palestinian Legislative Council. The prime minister now had the responsibility of forming the cabinet, and the cabinet was obliged to seek a vote of confidence from the Legislative Council. Each minister was to report to the prime minister and the ministers would collectively exercise executive power in all areas. In addition, however, the prime minister would be obliged to report and be responsible to the president, and the president would have the power to remove him from office. The outcome was a mixed system in which the president and the prime minister shared authority. A reference guide to the establishment of the post of prime minister is in Appendix 1.

From my position as the head of the Legislative Council, I welcomed the changes and confirmed that the appointment of Abu Mazen was in my view the correct decision. Both the United States and Israel indicated that they regarded Abu Mazen as an acceptable appointee. Abu Mazen was cautious, holding back from officially accepting the post until the authority and duties of the new position were explicitly confirmed, as he wished to be certain of what his powers would be. This increased the urgency of our internal discussions, particularly because of the recurrent tendency in American and European circles to speak of the need to curtail the authority of President Arafat, or at least to distribute his duties and divide his authority, putting an end to what they called his exclusive decision-making power. Despite Abu

Mazen's brave words, the perception was hard to avoid that the international advocates of changes seemed to intend to diminish President Arafat's authority. On 19 March 2003 Abu Mazen officially assumed the position of prime minister.

Though he had given his assent, Abu Ammar, having become accustomed over decades to his commanding position within the institutions of the Palestinians, could hardly be blamed if he sometimes struggled to adjust himself to the new situation. In practice, therefore, the role of prime minister was never going to be easy. It was this that caused trouble for Abu Mazen after he accepted the post, though we had taken much care to create a structure where the appointment of Abu Mazen as prime minister would not in reality lead to the sidelining of President Arafat, as Israel and the United States had hoped. Though Abu Mazen would take charge of internal affairs and would supervise the portfolios of his ministers, including that of the interior minister, security would remain under the President's general oversight. Whether the change measured up to the expectations of the United States and Israel, however, was another matter, since negotiation with Israel remained the prerogative of Abu Ammar, in his capacity as chairman of the PLO, as these negotiations had always been conducted by the PLO rather than by the Palestinian Authority. This was no doubt a disappointment for Ariel Sharon.

In practice, it was not surprising that President Arafat's relationship with his new prime minister was ambiguous, despite good will on all sides. Problems seemed inevitable, even when the incumbent of the new post was a man such as Abu Mazen, an old colleague whom Abu Ammar had known well for virtually the whole of his active life. In particular, President Arafat found it hard to accept that he was henceforth to be at arm's length from the operation of the Palestinian security services, though he retained the ceremonial title of Palestinian commander-in-chief. It was this that would bring difficulties for Abu Mazen as the first incumbent of the post.

After his appointment, Abu Mazen began at once to prepare for the formation of his government. The new constitutional provisions allowed him a margin of three weeks to present a cabinet list to President Arafat for approval and to be endorsed by a vote of confidence in the Legislative Council. Soon after Abu Mazen began his consultations,

however, he found himself faced with a number of difficulties which led him to threaten to resign from the position he had only just accepted, if he did not have the freedom to implement change. He insisted on including in his cabinet the security chief Muhammad Dahlan as the minister of the interior with responsibility for the security services, and also Major General Nasser Yousef. These were both seasoned officials in the security field. Abu Ammar objected to the appointments because he insisted that security should remain in his own hands and not be given to an interior minister. Abu Mazen accepted an extension to the time limit for the formation of a cabinet, and after some argument with Abu Ammar he was finally able to appoint his chosen ministers. He then needed to get his appointments approved by the Legislative Council, some of the members of which were also opposed to his choices and were proving somewhat inflexible. The Palestinian political arena seemed to have taken to the spirit of democracy in a big way, including the freedom to delay and obstruct. Controversy continued to the extent that the European Union urged the Palestinians to get over their differences and expedite the process of forming a government. Even President Bush said he was anxiously waiting for the approval of the formation of the government so that he could announce his much anticipated plan, the roadmap.

With all of that, it must be said that a positive aspect of the situation was the new-found ability of the Palestinian leadership to throw itself into a democratic system with honesty and a spirit of fair play. Even the disagreement between President Arafat and Abu Mazen over the choice of certain ministers was in the end a healthy phenomenon. Democracy depends on the plurality of opinions and on divergent and competitive ways of thinking. The whole episode in the end, if anything, proved President Arafat's authority, as he showed he could operate with firmness within the new system in a way that only confirmed his statesmanship. I did not personally consider that the outside pressure to which we had undoubtedly been subjected would prove in the long run to have been too detrimental, as we had adopted with good will a new and more democratic system that was not far removed from what we had been in any case considering.

Sadly, before many weeks had passed, the differences between Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen became less amenable to mediation and

turned into an ongoing and painfully public row. Efforts were made by internal mediators, including myself, to mend the rift between the President and the Prime Minister. From my side, I saw that the differences between the two had increased significantly. I remarked at the time that they did not disagree over the principle of the exercise of authority, but rather they differed over specific issues and there was a growing crisis of confidence. Each had doubts over the intentions of the other and these doubts grew until the two were no longer able to work together. As I put it, 'Neither can work alone in isolation from the other; however, they have lost the ability to work together. This is where the problem lies.' I made it known that I believed that the situation was becoming unbearable for the Palestinian people, whose tribulations were surely already sufficient, and that it was being aggravated by continuing external interference.

In the meantime, the row between Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen burst the bounds of private discussion and became a media circus. As March drew to a close, I found this was becoming distasteful and chose to withdraw temporarily from the political arena by accepting several outstanding invitations that had come to me as Speaker of the Legislative Council to visit a number of foreign parliaments. I was away from Palestine for around a month. I did not wish to take sides and felt I could no longer intercede between Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen, after all the efforts I had made. Some friends tried to tell me I was well placed to intervene positively and to calm the strife that had become widespread within the Palestinian polity. The implication was that by stepping back I was failing in my duty. However, I found it impossible to do otherwise.

It was clear that the crucial point of difference between the two men was the same disagreement that had arisen at the very start: the day-to-day control of the security services. This, however, was only one of many disputes between them that had begun to be reflected in factional antagonism in the country. Before I set off on my travels, I tried to persuade both of them to hold a private meeting at which all issues would be up for discussion, as a last ditch attempt to settle their differences. The Central Committee of Fatah and the Executive Committee of the PLO had each attempted to hold meetings to bring them together, but Abu Mazen had avoided attending both of them.

When all efforts failed, the quarrel began to spread into differences of opinion between members of the Legislative Council. As speaker, I made it clear that I disapproved of allowing the undertakings of the Legislative Council to be obstructed by factional conflicts that were irrelevant to its work. Although some of the steadiest heads in Fatah were attempting to reconcile Abu Mazen with Abu Ammar, there were growing suggestions that there could be a vote of no confidence in the Legislative Council in the Prime Minister. These ideas were coming in particular from a turbulent group of Legislative Council members associated with Fatah. As I said at the time,

I hope that we can avoid that. I also hope that we can avoid all issues to do with the issue of confidence. It is not on the table for us to grant or refuse the government a new vote of confidence, because it already has our confidence. I am not the arbiter of what can happen in this Council, but I do ask for some appreciation of the difficulty of the present circumstances, and for this issue not to be on the table. I refuse to allow the Council to become an arena for further escalation of this conflict.

Despite the problems within our political system, however, diplomacy in relation to the peace process carried on. Extraneous events began once more to impact on our situation while our attempts to negotiate with the Israelis continued. On 19 March 2003, the same day that Abu Mazen became prime minister, a new chapter began in the Middle East with the outbreak of war in Iraq, when it was invaded by a United States-led alliance. The fate of Iraq is another story and it is beyond the scope of this book. However, just as 11 September 2001 had transformed our situation, the American-led invasion of Iraq represented a similar upheaval. The immediate impact on the Palestinians was that Israel renewed its campaign to denigrate President Arafat, condemning him by associating him with Saddam Hussein, just as they had made a futile attempt on the eve of the war in Afghanistan to portray him as a second Osama Bin Laden. The American administration was thankfully not taken in by such simplistic misrepresentations. However, the Israeli leadership continued to insist that Arafat's 'reign', as they put it, was over, or alternatively that the Palestinian Authority was a terrorist entity, or that the Palestinian president had effectively brought his historical role to an end by his own actions.

Despite their immediate preoccupation with the war in Iraq, the Americans, fortunately, continued to maintain their interest in the peace process. On 22 March 2003, with Israel's elections over and the Palestinian prime minister installed, the Quartet held a meeting at foreign ministerial level at which the roadmap was formally launched and the peace process was once more declared to be under way. The United States and its Western allies appeared at this point seriously committed to the resumption of the peace process and the implementation of the roadmap. Major American military operations in Iraq were declared to be over on 15 April 2003. On 30 April 2003 the Bush administration officially proposed the final version of the roadmap, which was inspired by the Mitchell Report and had been in preparation since June 2002, presenting it to the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority with the support of the Quartet, which had committed itself to its implementation. The full text of the roadmap in this final version is given in Appendix 4. The Palestinian Authority in due course gave its approval but Sharon's government, as will be seen, added 14 crippling reservations that effectively stripped the plan of meaning.

The broad outlines of the roadmap were as follows. There were to be three phases. The first phase would be accomplished in May 2003, with 'an unconditional cessation of violence,' together with a resumption of 'security co-operation' with Israel. This phase would also see the initiation of 'comprehensive political reform' aiming at building Palestinian institutions, accompanied by a reconfirmation of 'Israel's right to exist in peace and security.' For its part, Israel would confirm its commitment to a 'two-state vision [including] an independent, viable, sovereign, Palestinian state,' and would take the necessary measures 'to improve the humanitarian situation' of the Palestinians. Israel was also supposed to begin 'immediately' to dismantle the 'settlement outposts' that had been built since March 2001, and also, in accordance with the recommendations of the Mitchell Report, to freeze 'all settlement activity (including the natural growth of settlements)'.

In the second phase of the implementation of the roadmap, from June 2003 to December 2003, all efforts would be directed towards 'the option of creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional

borders and attributes of sovereignty', as a transitional stage towards 'a permanent status settlement.' This was a goal that would only be achievable 'when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror, and is ready and able to build a willing democracy which will be practiced on the bases of tolerance and liberty'. Agreement on establishing this state, with its provisional borders, would be reached through 'a process of Israeli-Palestinian engagement', to be initiated by an international conference held by the Quartet. In addition, in this phase, Arab countries would restore their relations with Israel to their status before the Intifada.

The third phase would take place between 2004 and 2005. There would be a further international conference at the beginning of 2004 to ratify the agreement on 'an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders', and negotiations on final status issues would begin in 2005. The two sides would reach, at the end of the negotiation process, a final and comprehensive agreement to end the conflict on the basis of Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397. The end result would be two states: Israel plus a sovereign, independent and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

On 10 May 2003, prior to the full acceptance of the roadmap by both sides, the American secretary of state Colin Powell began a Middle East tour, beginning less than two months after the invasion of Iraq, to relaunch the renewed initiative on the part of the United States. This was Colin Powell's first visit to the Palestinian territories for a year. His meetings with us were scheduled to take place in Ramallah but we moved to Jericho just before Powell arrived in the region. It was said that this was an attempt to avoid embarrassment if Colin Powell were to come to Ramallah but not meet President Arafat. There was also another reason, however. This was that at the time of Colin Powell's visit to the Palestinian territories, we were still living for the most part under occupation. Of all our cities, only Jericho was outside Israeli military control. It was therefore my decision that this was where we should meet the American Secretary of State. Colin Powell was to talk to the Israelis on the day of his arrival and would then move on to us. We agreed that the American Secretary of State would participate in three sessions of talks with us when he arrived on 11 May 2003. In the first of these, he would meet Abu Mazen in

his capacity as prime minister and head of the Palestinian executive branch. I would then meet the Secretary of State in my role as speaker of the Legislative Council and hence effectively the representative of the Palestinian legislative branch. Finally, he would meet a number of representatives of Palestinian civil society organisations to gain an idea of popular feeling.

Colin Powell was to be accompanied by his assistant secretary of state, William Burns, and the American consul in Jerusalem, Jeffrey Feltman. In preparation, I briefed these two officials in Ramallah for Colin Powell's visit. I conveyed to them the need, as I saw it, for the American administration to continue to stand behind the roadmap and assured them of the Palestinian Authority's continuing support. I asked them to take steps to remove the obstacles the Israelis had placed in its way. In particular, I asked for an end to the siege still imposed on President Arafat, the arbitrary closures, the military checkpoints, Israel's targeted assassinations and its punitive house demolitions. I also called for a halt to Israel's plans to isolate Jerusalem from the West Bank, for a freeze on settlement activity, and for the restoration of freedom of movement to the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. I also insisted that the release of the thousands of Palestinians arrested by Israel for supposed security reasons remained a fundamental issue. In addition, I pointed out that the apparent willingness of the United States to accept Israel's 14 reservations, and in particular the cancellation of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, would be a problem. I told them that in our view Israel's reservations indicated nothing less than Sharon's determination to evade the implementation of Israel's commitments altogether, which would destroy the viability of the roadmap.

I did not on this occasion wish to comment to the Americans on the news that was already emerging from Israel that Ariel Sharon had decided to convey his verdict on the roadmap directly to President George W. Bush, whom he was scheduled to meet on 20 May at the White House in Washington, rather than to the Secretary of State. I said that I did not wish to draw any conclusions before hearing from Colin Powell, who was after all coming to visit us from Washington DC, where American political decisions are made, and would already be informed by his meetings with Israeli officials. I added that when

Mr Powell came to see us we would listen to him and let him know our points of view, which were that for the roadmap to work both sides had to participate, not just one, and that the Quartet had to energetically monitor the roadmap's progress. In addition, Israel should be obliged to fulfil the commitments required of it. If the Israelis were intending to be so discourteous as to refuse to inform the Secretary of State of their policy on the roadmap, I felt that this was no business of mine.

On 11 May, when Colin Powell met Abu Mazen, the Prime Minister informed the Secretary of State that the Palestinians were prepared to accept the roadmap as it stood. However, as we anticipated, while the Palestinian leadership agreed to the roadmap and showed its willingness to implement the commitments it imposed on the Palestinian side, Sharon's government indicated they would only accept it with reservations. As I have mentioned above, 14 separate caveats were made on the Israeli side, leading to a demand for changes in the prepared version of the document, as we later found out after Sharon had confided his views directly to President Bush. The White House bent over backwards to accommodate Israel's demands. Whether the State Department was keen on these changes or not can only be conjectured. On 23 May 2003, however, the American administration sent a note to Israel saying that the United States would fully revise the roadmap in accordance with Israel's reservations.

Nevertheless, when it was my turn to meet Colin Powell, he seemed to be in a good mood, despite having had what was presumably a disappointing meeting with Ariel Sharon. He opened the discussion by saying that he was keen to hear my evaluation of the situation and what I thought it was necessary to do in such a gloomy political climate. I explained to him in clear terms that all the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people were hanging on this visit. I reminded him that when I had met him in Washington four months earlier, I had assured him that we were prepared to make great effort and that we earnestly desired progress. This was in the light of President Bush's historic promise to establish an independent Palestinian state, an outcome which we believed that we deserved after a long period of suffering.

I reaffirmed to him that, on the Palestinian side, we had already carried out a number of the measures specified by the roadmap. We

had changed the Palestinian constitution, as we had been requested to do, and had appointed a prime minister with real authority under new constitutional arrangements, as well as an interior minister and a justice minister. We had also implemented an important series of reforms in the context of financial administration and in the management of our budget, with the intention of continuing our efforts in that direction. In the field of security, we would make the utmost effort to impose the rule of law, despite the existence of armed factions beyond our control, and we would strive to establish the undivided authority of the government. As a first step, we intended to control the carrying and possession of weapons. I reminded Colin Powell that this was a difficult issue for us and we had no desire to become embroiled in any armed confrontation with militant factions, or set foot on the road to any kind of civil war, preferring the path of dialogue.

Colin Powell's response was as follows:

I spent three hours with Sharon. He does not want to kill the process and he is not playing games, but he has a lot of anxiety and doubts. He wants you to perform practically and we agree with him on that and we make demands on him in a balanced way. He has given me a list of measures and facilitations that he intends to implement, which include releasing a number of those arrested, opening the trade crossings, easing of the movement of workers, businessmen and others. Some of you say this is nothing, that they are marginal issues and that they have been seen before, but at least it is a step. He knows that during his meeting with President Bush on 20 May in Washington, the President expects him to promise more progress and further measures. Mr Bush will demand that he meets you halfway.

Turning to security, Colin Powell added that he had already spoken with Abu Mazen and other members of the Palestinian government on this issue. He agreed that it was of the utmost importance for Palestinian officials to speak against violence and to openly reject it with one voice. However, he was critical of President Arafat, whom he said was in the habit of saying one thing and doing the opposite. He added, 'The culture of peace has to become part of the Palestinian culture.' He put to me the rhetorical question, 'Why do you carry out violence when it takes you further away from having a state?' Addressing the question of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, he added, 'Perhaps they can be

convinced to halt their violence but in the end they have to be turned into political movements. We will help by pressurising the Syrians to close their offices and put a stop to their activities.'

At the end of this meeting, in which we also discussed other matters, such as the critical economic situation, Powell asked me about how I envisaged the continuing role of President Arafat under the new constitutional arrangements. My response was as follows:

I will be very frank because this is a very important matter to us. I was hoping that the President's position could be dealt with differently. He is the symbol of the Palestinian people and their elected leader. He is the man who signed the peace treaties with Israel. He cannot possibly be bypassed. He is our guide. If you want Abu Mazen to succeed, he needs to be accepted by the Israelis and he needs your support. But he also needs the approval of the Palestinian people and the backing of President Arafat. Without these things he will fail. Appointing a prime minister is important so that there is a person who can be held responsible for the actions of the Palestinian Authority. With this appointment, there was evolution in the Palestinian political system, not a coup against Arafat, as the Israelis wanted. I hope that Sharon finds a solution to his issues in dealing with President Arafat.

I went on to give the Secretary of State my impression of Sharon's attitude to Abu Ammar as follows:

During my meetings with Sharon I have raised with him five times the need to lift the siege on President Arafat, but only on the last occasion did he give any response. Sharon said to me that he respected my loyalty to President Arafat and that he could comprehend Arafat's struggle for his people. But he told me that his strategy and that of President Arafat were irreconcilable. If Arafat did not change, Sharon added, it would be difficult or impossible for Abu Mazen to succeed in his mission.

After Colin Powell's visit, a number of meetings between us and the Israelis ensued. These were part of the effort aimed at breaking the apparently inexorable cycle of violence between Israel and the Palestinians. On 18 May 2003 Abu Mazen held a meeting with Ariel Sharon, at Sharon's office in West Jerusalem. I was present at this meeting, which lasted for three hours. Abu Mazen's interior minister, the former Palestinian security chief Muhammad Dahlan, was also in

attendance. We continued the discussion of issues raised at my meeting with Sharon on 5 February. On the Israeli side, Sharon was backed up by his close adviser, Dov Weisglass, a lawyer and businessman who was head of his office. His military secretary, General Yoav Gallant and his political advisor, Shalom Turgeman were also present. I shall present here a detailed account of the conversation that took place at this meeting.

Sharon opened the proceedings briefly by congratulating Abu Mazen on his appointment as prime minister and thanking him for his readiness to cooperate with Israel in ending the cycle of violence. He expressed his anger at recent incidents in Hebron, saying that in his view both the Palestinian and Israeli people deserved a better future. He said that an opportunity had presented itself for progress that should not be lost, and he had high hopes that this meeting as a start would be rebuilding trust and understanding. Abu Mazen replied, in thanking Sharon for his congratulations and for the invitation to meet again, adding that he was prepared for such a meeting to be a chance to re-establish the trust that had been damaged by the events of the past two years. He spoke of the difficulty of his mission as prime minister under trying circumstances.

Moving on to matters of substance, Abu Mazen emphasised that the Palestinian Authority condemned all violent attacks and killings, such as the ones in Hebron, but added that we also condemned incursions into Palestinian territory and the killing of Palestinian citizens. He pointed to recent incidents in Beit Hanoun and in the West Bank, where similar incidents were recurring regularly. He went on to say that the two governments of Israel and Palestine should strive for the continuity of reform, the cessation of violence and the restoration of the peace process in the interests of the two peoples. Abu Mazen went on to state the following principles, which were already embodied in our government's inaugural statement. These were:

1. There should be only one unitary Palestinian Authority.
2. There should be only one legitimate source of arms.
3. The same principles of law and order should be applied to everyone.
4. Political pluralism and the freedom of opinion and expression must be respected, and the rule of the majority must prevail.

He confirmed that the Palestinians had accepted the roadmap as the definitive statement of a viable peace plan, with an agreed monitoring mechanism. The Palestinians had had many concerns when it was first presented, but had decided the only way forward was to accept it without reservations. For this reason, Abu Mazen said the Palestinian Authority was at this meeting formally requesting the government of Israel to follow suit by accepting the roadmap without any changes.

As a delegation, we also pointed out to the Israelis that we were uncomfortable even with the language they were using about security, where they constantly emphasised such expressions as 'truce' and 'ceasefire'. We said we would rather talk about a comprehensive and final cessation of violence on both sides. On the subject of refugees, we said we accepted that this issue was to be left for the final status negotiations and it would be discussed by us with an open mind when such talks began. On the question of settlements, we said that the long-term future need not be discussed for the moment, but we would ask for all settlement activity to be frozen as specified in the roadmap.

Abu Mazen also pointed to immediate problems that needed to be resolved. First, he said that the Palestinian Authority could no longer accept the continuing siege of President Arafat, and it would have to be stopped. Secondly, he spoke of the Palestinian prisoners and those under arrest, of whom there were thousands. Notable among the prisoners whose release we sought were the two detained members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Marwan al-Barghouti and Hussam Khader. Marwan al-Barghouti was a well-known figure in Fatah in the West Bank who was accused by Israel of what they described as terrorist activity in the Tanzim movement. We also demanded that Abu al-Sukkar, another Fatah official who had been arrested, be freed. Others mentioned by name were Abdul Rahim Mallouh, Tayseer Khaled and Rakad Salem. A further issue he raised was the status of Jerusalem, with the state of isolation imposed on it and the future of the Palestinian institutions that had offices there. He asked for internal and external checkpoints in the Palestinian territories to be removed and for a halt to the construction of the separation wall. He said the Palestinian Authority ideally wanted open borders, but that a barrier built for security reasons could be tolerated if it followed the Green Line exactly and was built in Israeli territory, not ours. Finally,

he reminded the Israelis that we had not dropped our demand for the immediate transfer of funds due to the Palestinian Authority as agreed under the previous arrangements.

On the security issue, Muhammad Dahlan explained that he was developing a Palestinian security plan, but that this could not be implemented without Israeli cooperation. The Israelis maintained that they had done nothing to impair Palestinian security in Gaza and that it should be capable of functioning normally. We reminded them that most of the security buildings in Gaza had been damaged in Israeli attacks and the prisons had been destroyed. This meant that the security forces were not able to operate at full capacity in Gaza. In the West Bank, of course, our security capability was zero due to the Israeli reoccupation. Finally, Abu Mazen renewed his request for the Israelis to accept the roadmap in full, with no amendments or dilutions, and for it to be implemented immediately.

Sharon responded without a pause. He opened by stressing yet again that Israel's priority was security, which was the precondition for progress on all other issues. He would not compromise the security of Israel or the security of the people of Israel, either then or in the future. He said Israel would be willing to make what he called painful concessions if security were assured. The war on terror, as he put it, had to be real and comprehensive. He added that a simple ceasefire would not be enough, but that the infrastructure of so-called terror organisations had to be seen to be dismantled. This would require the resumption of cooperation between the Palestinian and Israeli security apparatuses, the confiscation of illegal weapons and the cessation of their manufacture and a halt to the incitement of violence. Only then, he added, could we begin on the peace process.

As for the roadmap, he asserted that Israel had already accepted its principles and President Bush's vision of two states living side by side in peace. On this basis, if the commitment to stop violence and terrorism were implemented by the Palestinians, Israel would open negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on the creation of a provisional state, which would be followed by the permanent establishment of an independent Palestinian state and an end to the conflict between us. This final result would be a Palestinian state living in peace adjacent to the state of Israel. He said he envisaged a formula on the lines of the

following: "The aim of the process is two national states for two peoples living side by side in security and peace. Israel will be a state for the Jewish people; and Palestine will be a state for the Palestinian people. Within this framework the national aspirations of both people will be achieved." On the issue of refugees, Sharon said he was aware that there were issues to be resolved and that this needed to be incorporated in the roadmap.

Sharon told us that he had handed to Colin Powell a list of the measures that Israel was prepared to take. He said he was prepared to give orders to redeploy troops in the Gaza Strip and in parts of the West Bank. The meaning of this step, he added, was that Israel would leave the city centres in the West Bank; there would be a reduction in military presence, and military interference in daily life would no longer be apparent; and freedom of movement of the population would gradually increase. In the Gaza Strip, he promised that Israel would not undertake comprehensive military operations as long as the Palestinian side maintained security. However, he added, Israel would not hold back from responding if the Palestinian security authorities failed to take action against armed attacks or groups known to be planning attacks. If danger became evident and the Palestinians failed to take measures against it, Israel would intervene. However, Israel would reduce its activities in every area where the Palestinians were able and willing to maintain their own control, and Israel would cooperate on extending the means to pursue this aim.

As for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, he said he was aware that this was a problem over which we had a legitimate concern and promised to undertake a comprehensive review of the list of prisoners with a view to deciding who could be released. Concerning the closures and checkpoints, he said Israel would be happy if those checkpoints did not exist, but the problem was that with freedom of movement, there were armed attacks and weapons were smuggled from place to place. With an end to terror, there would be no further need for the checkpoints. On the issue of the separation wall, he said he would personally prefer to have no wall or barriers, but asked what could then be done against the incursion of suicide bombers into Israel using unrestricted routes through Israeli Arab areas. Those concerned, he added, were only a minority of the Israeli Arabs, but, interestingly, he expressed the view that this minority would increase. The barrier,

he asserted, was not intended as a political border, but was simply a supplementary security measure. He then turned briefly to the crucial issue of the difficult situation President Arafat was in. He accused Arafat of giving shelter to terrorists, claiming that attacks had been carried out under direct instructions from the Muqataa, and that after such attacks, the individuals concerned were able to return to the Muqataa and receive protection there.

Returning finally to the roadmap once more, Sharon spoke as follows: 'I have declared that I accept the principles of President Bush's speech and the principles of the roadmap, but we have made some remarks on it which we have passed to the Americans and we await an answer from them. There are points in the roadmap that create problems for us because of internal opposition inside Israel in relation to these issues.' This fell well short of an acceptance that the roadmap should be the starting point for a renewed peace process. It was also clear by the end of the meeting how far the Israeli position was from ours. However, Sharon made three suggestions in relation to our future proceedings. First, he said that periodical meetings at prime ministerial level should be held. Second, meetings at ministerial level should be regularly held on security and in the civil, economic and legal arenas. Thirdly, he asked for a further meeting with Abu Mazen after his return from Washington. It should be noted that in accordance with Ariel Sharon's wish for a follow-up meeting, Abu Mazen went to meet him again on 20 July, though their meeting was principally occupied by mutual recrimination and disagreements between the two over the nature and extent of progress that each side had made.

At the close of the 17 May meeting, Abu Mazen summarised the Palestinian position in a formal statement, as follows:

First, we have explained to the Israeli Prime Minister our position regarding the necessity that Israel should accept the roadmap as it stands, and that its implementation should begin immediately under observation by the Quartet, as long as it is accepted as it is, with no modifications.

Second, we reaffirm our unwavering position on the following matters:

1. We totally reject the siege imposed on President Yasser Arafat and the restrictions on his freedom of movement. We demand that these measures be lifted immediately so that the President can freely exercise his role as leader.

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2. We confirm our total rejection of all measures of collective punishment imposed on our people including closures, curfews, house demolition, assassinations and arrests. We also confirm our rejection of Israeli re-occupation of areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority and we demand that such practices cease. We demand the closure of military checkpoints and the restoration of freedom of movement for our citizens as well as for members of the Legislative Council and ministers whose immunity must be respected.
3. We confirm our rejection of all settlement activities, the separation wall project and we confirm the need to halt its construction. We also draw attention to the isolation, separation and state of siege imposed on Jerusalem, and its isolation from its environment, in breach of the signed agreements which must be respected until the final status agreement is reached.
4. We call for the release of thousands of prisoners and those arrested from among our people and their fighters.
5. We inform the Israeli Prime Minister that we intend to reconstruct Gaza's airport and immediately start the construction of Gaza's planned international seaport.

Third, we confirm our readiness to implement all commitments we have undertaken pertaining to security arrangements, reform measures and reconstruction in accordance with the roadmap, so long as Israel acts in parallel.

7

THE AQABA SUMMIT AND AFTER

On 4 June 2003 a summit meeting was held in Aqaba, Jordan. This was the result of an initiative by President George W. Bush and it was meant to clarify issues and prepare the way for further bilateral meetings between the two sides. The summit was hosted by Jordan's King Abdullah II and was attended by both Abu Mazen and Ariel Sharon, in the presence of the President of the United States. On 26 May, shortly before the Aqaba summit, while speaking in Israel to a Likud party gathering, Sharon went as far as to declare his conditional acceptance of the roadmap and surprised his supporters when he began to air the conclusions he had reached regarding the idea of peace with the Palestinians. This did not entirely meet with the approval of Likud's membership. To a stormy meeting, Sharon is reported to have said, 'I think that the idea of continuing to keep 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation – and yes, it is an occupation: you might not like the word but what is happening is occupation – is bad for Israel and also for the Palestinians, as well as for the Israeli economy [...] Do you want to remain in Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah and Bethlehem?' His use of the word 'occupation' infuriated some of his ministerial colleagues. It may be that the logic of some of our ideas on the Palestinian side was beginning to get across to Ariel Sharon as he faced up to the difficulties of government. More probably, he was aware of the weight of American pressure that was about to be brought to bear on him in Aqaba. On the other hand, there were still provisions in the roadmap that Sharon and his party found very difficult to accept.

Meanwhile, the day before the summit, President Bush was sounding out wider Arab opinion by attending a preparatory meeting of Arab states in Sharm el-Sheikh, where President Hosni Mubarak welcomed King Abdullah II, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, the King of Bahrain, Shaykh Hamad Bin Issa, and Abu Mazen, who represented the Palestinian side in the absence of President Arafat. A statement was issued after the Sharm el-Sheikh meeting, which called on the Palestinian people to embrace its new leadership, by which was meant the new Palestinian government, headed by a prime minister who as the summit put it, supported 'reform, democracy and the fight against terrorism'.

At the close of the Aqaba summit, there was no press conference where the participants made themselves available for questions from journalists. Instead, prepared statements were given by the main protagonists. President Bush spoke first:

All here today now share a goal: the Holy Land must be shared between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel, living at peace with each other and with every nation of the Middle East.

All sides will benefit from this achievement and all sides have responsibilities to meet. As the roadmap accepted by the parties makes clear, both must make tangible immediate steps toward this two-state vision.

I welcome Prime Minister Sharon's pledge to improve the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian areas and to begin removing unauthorized outposts immediately. I appreciate his gestures of reconciliation on behalf of prisoners and their families, and his frank statements about the need for territorial contiguity.

As I said yesterday, the issue of settlements must be addressed for peace to be achieved. In addition, Prime Minister Sharon has stated that no unilateral actions by either side can or should prejudge the outcome of future negotiations. The Prime Minister also recognizes that it is in Israel's own interest for Palestinians to govern themselves in their own state. These are meaningful signs of respect for the rights of the Palestinians and their hopes for a viable, democratic, peaceful Palestinian state.

Prime Minister Abbas recognizes that terrorist crimes are a dangerous obstacle to the independent state his people seek. He agrees that the process for achieving that state is through peaceful negotiations. He has pledged to consolidate Palestinian institutions, including the security

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forces, and to make them more accountable and more democratic. He has promised his full efforts and resources to end the armed Intifada. He has promised to work without compromise for a complete end of violence and terror.

Abu Mazen then spoke as follows:

As we all realise, this is an important moment. A new opportunity for peace now exists, an opportunity based upon President Bush's vision and the Quartet's roadmap, which we have accepted without any reservations.

Our goal is two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The process is the one of direct negotiations to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to resolve all the permanent status issues, and end the occupation that began in 1967 under which Palestinians have suffered so much.

At the same time, we are not unaware of the suffering of the Jews throughout history. It is time to bring all this suffering to an end.

Just as Israel must meet its responsibilities, we, the Palestinians, will fulfil our obligations for this endeavour to succeed. We are ready to do our part.

Let me be very clear. There will be no military solution to this conflict; so we repeat our renunciation of terrorism against the Israelis wherever they might be. Such are inconsistent with our religious and moral traditions and are dangerous obstacles to the achievement of an independent, sovereign state which we seek. These methods also conflict with the kind of state we wish to build, based on human rights and the rule of law.

We will exert all of our efforts, using all our resources to end the militarisation of the Intifada and we will succeed. The armed Intifada must end, and we must use and resort to peaceful means in our quest to end the occupation and the suffering of Palestinians and Israelis and to establish the Palestinian state.

Abu Mazen reiterated the Palestinian Authority's commitment to implement what it had undertaken before its people and the international community, stating his determination to uphold the rule of law and the legitimacy of the unitary Palestinian Authority, together with the restriction of access to weapons and the promotion of democracy. He continued:

Our goal is clear and we will implement it firmly and without compromise: a complete end to violence and terrorism. And we will be full partners in the international war against terrorism. And we will call upon our partners in this war to prevent financial and military

assistance to those who oppose this position. We do this as a part of our commitment to the interests of the Palestinian people and as members of the larger family of humanity.

We will also act vigorously against incitement to violence and against hatred, in whatever forum and in whatever form this may take. We will take measures to ensure that there is no incitement to violence by Palestinian institutions.

We will continue our work to establish the rule of law and to consolidate government authority in accountable Palestinian institutions. We seek to build the kind of democratic state that will be a qualitative addition to the international community. All of the Palestinian Authority's security forces will take part in these efforts and will work together toward the achievement of these goals. Our national future is at stake and no one will be allowed to jeopardize it.

We are committed to these steps because they are in our national interests. In order to succeed, there must be a clear improvement in the lives of Palestinians. Palestinians must live in dignity. Palestinians must be able to move, work, go to school, visit their families and conduct a normal life. Palestinians must not be afraid for their lives, property or livelihood.

We welcome and stress the need for the assistance of the international community, and in particular of the Arab states, and we also welcome and stress the need for an American-led monitoring mechanism.

Together, we can achieve the goal of an independent Palestinian state, sovereign, viable, in the framework of good neighbours with all states in the region, including Israel.

For his part, Ariel Sharon declared Israel's readiness to dismantle the 'unauthorised' settlements within the framework of a peaceful settlement with the Palestinians and repeated what he had said to his own party, that Israel could not continue to occupy Palestinian land. He explained his government's appreciation of the importance of the establishment of a Palestinian state and of the restoration of trust between the Palestinians and the Israelis. He went on:

As the prime minister of Israel, the land which is the cradle of the Jewish people, my paramount responsibility is the security of the people of Israel and of the state of Israel.

There can be no compromise with terror, and Israel, together with all free nations, will continue fighting terrorism until its final defeat.

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Ultimately, permanent security requires peace. And permanent peace can only be obtained through security. There is now hope of a new opportunity for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Israel, like others, has lent its strong support for President Bush's vision expressed on June 24, 2002, of two states, Israel and the Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security. The government and people of Israel welcome the opportunity to renew direct negotiations according to the steps of the roadmap as adopted by the Israeli government to achieve this vision.

It is in Israel's interest not to govern the Palestinians, but for the Palestinians to govern themselves in their own state. A democratic Palestinian state fully at peace with Israel will promote the long-term security and well-being of Israel as a Jewish state.

There can be no peace, however, without the abandonment and elimination of terrorism, violence and incitement. We will work alongside the Palestinians and other states to fight terrorism, violence and incitement of all kinds. As all parties perform their obligations, we will seek to restore normal Palestinian life, improve the humanitarian situation, rebuild trust and promote progress toward the President's vision. We will act in a manner that respects the dignity as well as the human rights of all people.

We can also reassure our Palestinian partners that we understand the importance of territorial contiguity in the West Bank for a viable Palestinian state. Israeli policy in the territories that are subject to various negotiations with the Palestinians will reflect this fact.

We accept the principle that no unilateral actions by any party can prejudge the outcome of our negotiations.

In regard to the unauthorized outposts, I want to reiterate that Israel is a society governed by the rule of law. Thus, we will immediately begin to remove unauthorized outposts.

Israel seeks peace with all its Arab neighbours. Israel is prepared to negotiate in good faith wherever there are partners. As normal relations are established, I am confident that they will find in Israel a neighbour and a people committed to comprehensive peace and prosperity for all the peoples of the region.

Early responses to the summit from inside Israel indicated satisfaction. Israeli army radio, an authoritative source, said high-ranking officials in Sharon's office were happy with President Bush's position and that of Abu Mazen. Later they said that Israel was still waiting to see

Palestinian action on the ground. The Israeli foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, said the most important thing to come out of the Aqaba summit was President Bush's commitment to Israel's security as a Jewish state and his assurance that this would keep the return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel off the agenda of any negotiations. He said that the Aqaba summit had laid the groundwork for a real peace process, but that Israel would 'have to examine it carefully without getting carried away by dreams, as has happened on past occasions.' He repeated the Israeli doctrine that security must come first. He also pointed to the exclusion of Yasser Arafat from the summit, noting that this was 'a great achievement for Israel and an international affirmation of its position which holds that he is no longer relevant in the region.' He added that Abu Mazen's statements, 'which seem serious and honest', will undergo the test of performance. Asked about the dismantling of unauthorised settlements, he said that they were few in number and claimed that the vast majority of settlements had been built with the full approval of successive Israeli governments.

In fact, Sharon's intentions were quickly exposed when he failed completely to organise the evacuation of any of the illegal settlement outposts in the West Bank, despite having announced that he would take immediate steps to do so. As was his practice, Sharon had been making promises that he had no intention of keeping. Sharon's government's commitments at the summit were in fact, as usual, no more than empty words, and his goal, as always, was to evade the implementation of the substance of his commitments. Sharon did make a few concessions, however, in terms of removing checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza.

In contrast, on the Palestinian side the reaction to the Aqaba summit was angry and disappointed. Demonstrations organised by Hamas in the Gaza Strip protested against the summit and the statements issued at its close. The demonstrators chanted slogans condemning the summit, which they said had ignored the key problems of Jerusalem, the rights of refugees and the release of Palestinian prisoners. The five major Palestinian factions, Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PFLP and the DFLP, held a meeting in Gaza City in which they announced after hours of debate that resistance and the armed Intifada would continue. One of the leading figures in the Islamic Jihad movement in Gaza,

Muhammad al-Hindi, rejected any reference to the Palestinian resistance as 'terrorism' and defended the Palestinian people's right to resist until all their legitimate rights were secured. For Hamas, Ismail Haniyyah took the same stand on the continuation of the struggle but said that Hamas was ready to resume dialogue with Abu Mazen's Palestinian government. Later, however, Hamas decided to sever contact with it in protest against the position it claimed Abu Mazen had adopted at Aqaba. Closer to the leadership, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, Fatah's military wing, also criticised the concessions made to Israel's emphasis on security and the place of security within the roadmap.

Despite these and other Palestinian statements condemning the outcome of the summit, Abu Mazen stood firm. In a press conference in Ramallah, he said his position at the summit had the approval of Yasser Arafat and simply represented the implementation of what the Palestinians were in any case committed to under the roadmap. He described the criticisms directed at him as 'fishing in murky waters'. It was clear that Abu Mazen was already beginning to become uncomfortable with the position he found himself in. He stressed that he was open to dialogue with all in the Palestinian arena. But he reiterated his rejection of the growing violence of the Intifada, and said active efforts should be made 'to stop the bloodbath'. He criticised attacks recently carried out by Palestinian factions against Israeli targets, calling for them to end and repeating that the Palestinian people should choose the option of negotiation and strive to achieve their aims by political means. However, Abu Mazen snubbed Israel's demand for the recognition of a Jewish state. This was an issue which could affect the future of Israel's Palestinian citizens. He also refused to agree to abandon entirely the right of return for the Palestinian refugees. It seemed clear after the summit that Abu Mazen had received substantial support from President Bush, intended to reinforce his position. As the Palestinian prime minister, he now had a valuable historical opportunity to use the traction he had gained with the Americans. On 29 June 2003 he succeeded in brokering a tentative ceasefire, known as a *hudna*, in the violence between the Palestinian factions and Israel. However, the developments of the following days told against him.

On 1 July 2003 Abu Mazen and Sharon met to discuss progress on the roadmap. The atmosphere was ostensibly warm, but the real

relationship between the two was much more difficult. Sharon, as ever, laid all the emphasis on security and reportedly demanded that Abu Mazen take steps to disarm the Palestinian factions. Abu Mazen, not surprisingly, showed reluctance, not wishing to plunge the Palestinian territories into destructive violence between the factions and the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, Sharon refused to reconsider the issue of freeing Palestinian prisoners and detainees. This was a blow to Abu Mazen, whose popularity had begun to depend on the extent to which he could deliver on the promises he had made to the Palestinian public after negotiations with Israel to bring the prisoners home at an early date. Relations between Abu Mazen and Sharon worsened after this meeting. On 20 July they met again and on this occasion the pretence of cordiality was dropped. There were sharp exchanges about Sharon's failure to stop settlement activity and his refusal to release prisoners. Abu Mazen also received a blunt negative response when he asked for the siege of President Arafat to be lifted. The atmosphere had deteriorated rapidly. Sharon then left on a planned visit to Washington DC.

From 24 to 26 July 2003, Abu Mazen paid his first official visit to Washington. I went with him, in my capacity as speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as a member of a delegation which included other Palestinian officials. We were received at the United States Congress and met with leading members of the Senate and with Congressional committees. We spoke in private with Vice President Dick Cheney and the national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. These meetings culminated in a session with President Bush himself at the White House, followed by the prestigious occasion of a joint press conference for Bush and Abu Mazen. After our visit to the United States was over, the PLO mission representative in Washington, Hasan Abdul Rahman, who accompanied the delegation, sent a report to President Arafat, which went as follows:

In an unprecedented gesture, the Palestinian flag was raised over the Andrews air base. On Thursday 24 July, the first day of the visit, Abu Mazen and his delegation visited Congress and breakfasted with Senator Frist and Senator Daschle, respectively the leaders of the Republican majority and the Democratic minority in the Senate, as well as with the chairman and vice-chairman of the Senate appropriations committee. The

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aim of the meeting was for senators to familiarise themselves with Abu Mazen and members of his government. There was a general discussion on the position of the peace process. This was followed by a meeting with Senator Richard Lugar and Senator Joseph Biden of the foreign relations committee, in the presence of other members of the committee.

This meeting lasted for 45 minutes. The most important points that were raised were as follows. Firstly, the Senators indicated that the meeting represented a useful opportunity for the renewal of relations between the Palestinian Authority and the American Legislature. In addition, they indicated their support for President Bush's efforts to implement the roadmap. They also indicated their willingness to offer economic support to the Palestinian Authority and to assist it in the process of economic and social reconstruction. A further meeting took place between the Palestinian delegation and a group representing the House Committee for Foreign Relations, headed by the Republican Congressman, Henry Hyde, and the Democrat, Tom Lantos.

During the afternoon of the first day, the national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, visited Abu Mazen at his hotel. She was accompanied by Elliott Abrams and William Burns. The purpose of the meeting was to prepare for Abu Mazen's meeting with the President the next day, Friday. There were preliminary discussions of the topics scheduled to be discussed at the meeting with President Bush.

Abu Mazen met President Bush on Friday 25 July at 11.30. On the American side those present with the President were Vice President Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell, the secretary of state. On the Palestinian side, in addition to Abu Mazen, Abu Ala and Hasan Abdul Rahman were present. The meeting lasted for 30 minutes. The following are the most important points taken from the minutes of the meeting:

President Bush welcomed Abu Mazen and said that he understood the difficulty of the situation faced by Abu Mazen's government, since much was expected of them in a short period of time. The President went on to say that he was convinced that the Palestinian government's programme was one of peace and added that the measures they had taken until now reinforced his commitment to maintain his total personal involvement in the efforts to achieve the vision of peace he had announced on 24 June 2002. The President told Abu Mazen that by inviting him to the White House, his intention was to send a message to everyone that he trusted him.

President Bush added that the appointment of Ambassador John Wolf as his personal envoy to the Palestinians was intended to indicate his

personal interest in the peace process, since Ambassador Wolf enjoyed the highest level of the administration's trust. He said he was aware that the Palestinians wanted Israel to negotiate with good will and to implement their existing commitments, and he was also aware that Israel wanted the Palestinian Authority to dismantle 'terrorist organisations'.

He said he would speak strongly to Sharon about the separation wall and the settlements. When Abu Mazen showed the President a map of the barrier, Bush said it clarified that the barrier did not leave sufficient space for the establishment of a Palestinian state. In relation to economic support, Bush announced that he would send a delegation in September to look at the situation on the ground and to prepare a plan for Palestinian economic growth. As he put it, 'My administration's strategy is to help you so that the Palestinian people understand that peace is better for them than the Intifada'. He also said, in his own words, 'I know that the Palestinian people are one of the bravest people of the region and that they are talented'.

In reply, Abu Mazen thanked the President for his invitation and reception and for his support for the peace process through the roadmap. He confirmed the Palestinian Authority's commitment to the continuation of the financial and administrative reforms. He also told President Bush of the pressures facing his government on the Palestinian street because of the situation on the ground. He emphasised the importance of achieving a real and complete change on the subject of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, which he described as one of the most sensitive and vital subjects, since more than 6,000 recent detainees were being held by the Israeli authorities, in addition to the large number who had been in Israeli prisons for decades. Abu Mazen said that the people he was concerned about were freedom fighters, not criminals, who had been arrested and imprisoned in clashes between the Palestinian people and Israel that had arisen because of the occupation and the wars. As he made clear: 'To be able to turn over a new leaf in our relations with Israel, they have to be released.' Abu Mazen also insisted that Israeli settlement activity needed to be entirely halted.

A further topic Abu Mazen raised was that of the separation wall. He pointed out that it was inaccurate to say it was simply a security fence, as Israel claimed. It was in fact a wall and Israel intended it to represent the frontier between the Palestinians and the Israelis. For this reason, it was an 'apartheid' wall and must be abandoned. The Palestinians were against it in principle and did not want it, but if Israel wanted to build it then it should do so on its own land and not on Palestinian occupied land.

Abu Mazen also spoke about President Bush's diplomatic initiative, saying that it was more acceptable than any earlier American presidential initiative because it defined its intended result as the establishment of a Palestinian state which would be contiguous and viable. It also contained a definite timetable for the Palestinian state, aiming to bring it into being by mid-2005.

In addition to his remarks about President Bush's initiative, Abu Mazen spoke about the Arab peace plan put forward by Saudi Arabia as a point of reference for the peace process that defined the principles of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Abu Mazen proposed that the implementation of the first phase of the roadmap should be carried out in parallel with unofficial talks on final status issues. This was not intended to be a departure from the phased process outlined in the roadmap, but would be intended simply to expedite later discussions in order to gain time. President Bush immediately responded unfavourably to this suggestion, noting that all parties had to realise that the phases could not be leapfrogged or the process would become muddled. All sides needed to be patient, to make their best efforts, and be prepared to see the peace process move slowly forward.

On the issue of the Palestinian government's strategy for dealing with the Palestinian military organisations, and in particular with the military wing of the religious organisations, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Abu Mazen explained that he did not intend to allow there to be a military confrontation with these organisations, and he considered such a confrontation to be unacceptable. His belief, in contrast, was that through dialogue and negotiation all such groups could be persuaded to become part of Palestinian political life and civil society through the organisation of political parties, as had been the case in certain Arab countries. He pointed out that in Israel there were already four religion-based political parties.

Abu Mazen confirmed that he was committed to the centralisation of power in the hands of the Palestinian Authority and that only its official security services should be recognised. He also repeated that a truce, or even a ceasefire, was not a final goal, which should instead be to create a situation in which violence by both sides would be permanently stopped. This, however, would depend on the implementation of roadmap commitments by Israel. He listed these again, as follows. First, there should be a freeze on all settlement activity, as prescribed by the Mitchell Report, and Palestinian prisoners should be released. The construction of the separation wall must end for three reasons, namely that it allowed one

side to define the borders; it isolated the two peoples; and it was being built entirely on Palestinian land. The offices of the Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem must be reopened. And finally and most importantly, the siege on President Arafat must be lifted.

Here, President Bush asked Abu Mazen, 'Do you want me to speak to Sharon about President Arafat? Will that help you?' Abu Mazen replied, 'Please, Mr President, I ask you to speak to him. Of course, lifting the siege on President Arafat will help my government and it will help me. Also from a political, humanitarian and moral point of view it is not right that the president of the Palestinian people remain under siege.'

President Bush commented on Abu Mazen's strategy towards the Palestinian factions, remarking, 'I do not believe that it is possible to coexist with terror and there is only one way to deal with terrorists and that is to defeat them. I do not want to put too much pressure on you but that is my position.' On the question of bilateral relations between the United States and the Palestinians, President Bush said that he wanted to develop bilateral relations with the Palestinian Authority.

Abu Mazen responded by remarking that while he had noticed he seemed to have gained worldwide support, his backing among the Palestinian population was not so strong. People were waiting, he said, for their new prime minister to produce tangible results on the ground. Addressing President Bush, he said, 'Mr President, you are the only person who can help me by working with Sharon to change the situation regarding the checkpoints, the building of settlements, the separation wall and other such issues.' He also reminded the President of how important and sensitive the subject of Jerusalem was to the Palestinians, both the Muslims and the Christians. Israel's current activities in Jerusalem were increasing the tension. He noted that the Intifada began in Jerusalem and that Israel was once more inflaming the sentiments of the Palestinians and the wider Muslim world, with potential harmful consequences.

With the arrival of lunch, the conversation became general. The atmosphere was friendly and the topics we discussed were diverse. President Bush said that he was determined to help build two model states in the region: in Iraq and Palestine. I took the opportunity to repeat to President Bush personally what I had previously said about the issue of Jerusalem, adding a renewed warning about the new Israeli policies. In the evening, we spent 20 minutes with Vice President Dick Cheney, who backed up what President Bush had

said about security and the readiness of the American administration to offer help. Cheney said,

This is the fifth American president I have worked with, having previously worked with Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Bush Senior, but I see that we now have the best chance for the Middle East because President Bush is personally committed more than any former president. We are ready to help you and to push strongly to accomplish this process, but do not forget that everything depends on security.

In addition to our meetings with American political figures, at various moments during the visit the Palestinian delegation took the chance to meet leading representatives of the Palestinian, Arab and wider Muslim communities in the United States. It was also arranged for us to meet a Jewish group that included a number of leading American Jewish personalities. Abu Mazen also gave an address to the international affairs think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations.

As the summer months of 2003 wore on, after these visits to the United States by Sharon and Abu Mazen, relations with Israel worsened. On 5 August Abu Mazen cancelled a planned meeting with Ariel Sharon, angry with the Israeli leader for his ever more obvious undermining of the roadmap. It became clear that Abu Mazen was becoming increasingly frustrated as prime minister, while, as has been seen, internal criticism from Palestinian sources meant his domestic political situation went from bad to worse. The lack of any kind of progress in relations with Israel became evident. The Israeli government's unilateral implementation of its plans went on apace, despite promises that were made and then just as soon broken. Under the leadership of Ariel Sharon, it became apparent that Israel's expansionism would not cease. Israel continued with measures to 'Judaise' the city of Jerusalem through the building of settlements within the city, and to colonise the West Bank through the continued construction of settlement outposts there. It also carried on its other security-driven measures, isolating Jerusalem with the separation wall, which also blocked the entrance to Bethlehem, and imposing a de facto state of siege on a growing number of Palestinian cities and villages. In August the ceasefire, still holding against all the odds, came under more and more strain. Israel resumed its supposedly preventive attacks on Palestinian militants and a suicide bombing on 19 August killed 20 Israelis. In retaliation for this, Israel

killed a prominent Hamas official in Gaza, the engineer and university teacher Ismail Abu Shanab. This broke a truce that had lasted 51 days. On 1 September 2003 Sharon announced that he was breaking off all contact with the Palestinian Authority. Hamas, meanwhile, announced that the ceasefire had ended.

Abu Mazen asked me in my capacity as speaker to call a Legislative Council session so that he could present a report by the government on its first hundred days of work. The prospects for this session were not good. The session was planned to take place on 1 September. I sensed trouble, however, and delayed it to 4 September. The militant Fatah group seemed determined to table their motion of no confidence, which they expected to go against Abu Mazen. On the day, crowds gathered in front of the gates of the building shouting slogans against the government. Abu Mazen was angry and blamed me for not providing the necessary protection for him, although he had come to the Council accompanied by his interior minister and security chief, Muhammad Dahlan, and there were harsh words between us. I attempted to avert a motion of no confidence from being tabled, but in the event a motion signed by 15 Council members with Fatah affiliations was put on the table. After Abu Mazen had given his report, I asked the Council to agree to go into closed session to discuss a number of issues I did not want to be made public. Despite attempting to obtain the withdrawal of the motion of no confidence, I was obliged to let it go ahead, according to the procedure that was laid down, to be voted on at a later date. This was unacceptable to Abu Mazen, and on 6 September 2003 he resigned before the motion of no confidence could be voted on. Along with the frustration he had faced as the result of our internal difficulties, Abu Mazen's tenure of the office of prime minister had undoubtedly been extraordinarily difficult for a number of other reasons. His relationship with Abu Ammar had not been easy; he was coming under increasing internal criticism from a variety of directions; and there was the extraordinary difficulty of coping with Sharon, with his persistent failure to keep any promise. All of these factors had told on Abu Mazen's nerves. The text of his resignation speech, which sets out in sometimes painful detail the grievances he felt, is given in Appendix 5.

Official statements pointed to disagreements between Abu Mazen and President Arafat over the division of responsibility between them,

especially concerning control over the Palestinian security services. But it must be said that there was also another fundamental problem. This was the turmoil in internal Palestinian politics as militant Palestinian factions, some of them with links to various security organisations, jostled for extra-constitutional power. The root of the matter was that the unspoken agreement prohibiting violence between Palestinians had been breached as the antagonism intensified, so that Palestinian guns were now pointed at each other. There was a tragic breakdown of internal security. People feared for their lives. In addition, there was a grave deterioration in the economic security and living standards of Palestinian citizens. All this provoked the anger of the Palestinian street, which had had high hopes for Abu Mazen's government. In truth, this was the reason for his resignation, rather than a petty squabble with Abu Ammar.

President Arafat accepted Abu Mazen's resignation and, according to the constitutional framework we had drawn up, it was now up to Abu Ammar to nominate a new prime minister. I was aware that my name was in the frame to replace him, though this was a prospect over which I had grave misgivings, having observed Abu Mazen's troubled trajectory from a close and privileged viewpoint. The consequences of Abu Mazen's departure for Palestine, and of course for me personally, were to be momentous.

8

MY FIRST GOVERNMENT

On 7 September, the day after Abu Mazen's resignation, Abu Ammar convened a meeting of the Executive Committee of the PLO, after which he chaired a Fatah Central Committee meeting to discuss the formation of a new government. He had in fact already asked me in principle if I would take the job, but I had said no. I had seen what had happened to Abu Mazen and believed that the task would be virtually impossible. Now the position was vacant, however, and the appointment urgently needed to be made. Abu Ammar began to insist; I continued to refuse. The Fatah Central Committee and Abu Ammar's PLO colleagues all agreed that I should be nominated for the post. On 8 September President Arafat wrote me an official letter in which he instructed me to form a government in terms that did not allow me to refuse, calling on me to do my duty to make every effort to further Palestine's national project. Under such pressure from our national leader, I was obliged to accept. Having done so, I threw myself into the task without respite in the interests of national unity, which I believed was the underlying necessity. My belief was that national unity, with an end to factional conflict, was the necessary basis of a new government. I told all my colleagues that at this time of crisis we needed each other more than ever, as the Palestinian people were strong when united, but were weakened when divided by mistrust and factional interests.

It was a dangerous time. The roadmap had come to a dead end, owing to the Sharon government's reluctance to implement its provisions,

despite the lip service Sharon paid to it when it suited him. On our side, there were alarming signs of an incipient civil conflict between Palestinians. Consensus was lacking and dialogue was absent. No real attempt was being made to persuade the Palestinian factions to speak to each other, though there were vast differences in their positions, as well as between them and the Palestinian Islamic movements. Meanwhile, Israel insistently continued to call for President Arafat to go into exile, and to threaten that he would be attacked if he refused to leave. Abu Ammar's health was also obviously deteriorating. He suffered from severe stomach pains and sometimes could not eat for days. Despite that, he was always careful to be seen with guests and to attend meetings whenever he could, to allay the fears of the Palestinian people that he was not well. He was at all times a model of steadfastness, pride and dignity despite having by now been besieged for two years in his headquarters at the Muqataa, ringed by half destroyed buildings and surrounded by Israeli tanks.

On 10 September 2003 a session of the Palestinian Legislative Council was called to endorse my nomination and formally call upon me to form a cabinet. This did not happen, for a number of reasons. First, President Arafat and his immediate colleagues in the Fatah and PLO committees had not yet decided exactly what form the new government should take. They inclined towards the declaration of a state of emergency by presidential decree, followed by the immediate formation of an 'emergency government' with a restricted number of ministers. Another difficulty was that the Legislative Council could not be held on 10 September because of Israeli restrictions on the movement of its members. Only the members who were already in Ramallah were able to attend, so that instead of a full session of the Legislative Council, an informal debate was held on the legality of an 'emergency government'. Their conclusion was that such a government could be formed without the approval of the full Legislative Council as it could be established by presidential decree, which would be valid for one month and could thereafter be renewed.

It was imperative to take action, however. On 11 September the *Jerusalem Post* reported that Sharon's cabinet had already taken a decision in principle to expel President Arafat but did not intend to act immediately. Clearly, our situation was increasingly perilous. Instead

of waiting for the Legislative Council session that we had thus far been unable to hold, the Executive Committee of the PLO and the Central Committee of Fatah decided that they could hold a joint meeting to formalise the proposal discussed by those Legislative Council members who had been able to reach Ramallah that I should form an emergency cabinet. We were beginning to enter uncharted constitutional waters.

Though I respected this decision, I felt I could not myself head such a government, as what I believed would be best for the Palestinian people was something quite different. I wanted to form a full-sized cabinet, and one which would be drawn from all Palestinian factions and constructed on the principle of national unity. In this tense atmosphere, before the Fatah and PLO committees were able to meet, I sent a letter to Abu Ammar in which I asked him to relieve me of the duty of heading the emergency cabinet. I emphasised that I was ready to work with him on any other task but could not undertake to form a new government in these circumstances. Our President, however, was still inclined to take the advice to use his constitutional privilege to declare a state of emergency for one month and announce the formation of an emergency government. He therefore firmly rejected my refusal to form a government and continued to examine the avenues open to him.

On 14 and 15 September 2003 Abu Ammar presided over a series of Fatah meetings to discuss the implications of the formation of a new emergency Palestinian government in the face of Israel's current threats. Having concluded after much agonised thought that I had no alternative but to bow to President Arafat's wishes, I agreed to head up an emergency government if that was what he and the Fatah committee decided. I asked the Fatah and PLO committees not only to ratify my appointment but also to nominate the figures they wished to be members of the new cabinet. I did not want to make the choice, as it was clear that for such a government to function it needed to be totally supported by Fatah and to have the unqualified backing of President Arafat himself. I saw that there must be no friction, as had happened with Abu Mazen's government, which was for the moment carrying on as a caretaker administration.

Instead of proceeding down the track of an emergency cabinet, however, I still stuck to my original determination to form, if at

all possible either now or later, a broadly based national unity government, with 24 ministers drawn from factions across the Palestinian spectrum. I was not entirely opposed to the concept of an emergency government, if this should prove to be politically necessary, but my ideal was still to cast the net as widely as possible. President Arafat gave his blessing to my attempt, though the question remained of how it would obtain the endorsement of the Legislative Council. On 16 September 2003 Abu Mazen's outgoing cabinet held its last meeting.

At precisely this juncture, on 16 September 2003, the United States succeeded in aggravating President Arafat's situation yet further when it vetoed a UN Security Council resolution demanding that Israel should refrain from either harming him or forcing him into exile. Eleven members of the Security Council had voted in favour of the resolution and only the United States had voted against it. The veto angered the Palestinians. Saeb Erakat said he hoped Israel would not take the American action as a 'licence to kill' the Palestinian president. What was sure was that it was this kind of gesture that gave Israel the impression that it could continue with impunity to subject President Arafat to indignities that were frankly contrary to international law. Sharon's government appeared to care little for the state of chaos and instability into which it was dragging the whole area.

I threw myself into the attempt to assemble a comprehensive national unity cabinet. I was even more determined to succeed in this plan. Such a broad-based government would begin with a number of advantages. First and foremost, it would have the support of President Arafat and of Fatah, as I would simply refuse to proceed without their backing. In addition, its broad base would make it gain the sympathy and cooperation of many factions, including the Islamic groups. The younger generation also seemed ready to give it their support. Perhaps most importantly, if I was able to carry my plans through, it genuinely would be a national unity government. I outlined my agenda for the new government's programme as follows:

1. My government would be committed to existing Palestinian commitments and would take into consideration all existing Palestinian institutions, including the Central Council of the PLO, which would be regarded as a benchmark for the new government's policies.

2. We would seek to emphasise the authority of the PLO and give it an enhanced role in bringing together the Palestinian people and leading the national project.
3. I would seek to reinforce national unity in coexistence with political pluralism. A unitary Palestinian Authority would preserve national values and work towards national integration.
4. A dialogue with Hamas and Islamic Jihad would be resumed, on the basis of re-establishing the authority of law and order, and in the interest of security and political participation.
5. The principle of national dialogue would underlie the search for unanimity on existential issues.

After laying down this framework, I continued to hold talks with groups and factions in both the West Bank and Gaza. Beginning in Gaza on 21 September 2003, I started the process of consultation by meeting the Higher Committee for National and Islamic Factions. I also held an extended meeting with the local leaders of Fatah, and I also discussed participation in the government with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The leaders of Hamas were unable to move freely for security reasons because the Israeli government had declared their intention to target them, so I was not immediately able to meet them. However, despite that, I was in contact with the Hamas leadership abroad and I succeeded in holding several meetings with Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders away from the public eye. I received messages from each of them in which both organisations confirmed that they were ready for dialogue and would support a new government although they would not actually participate in it. This confirmed my instinct that the two Islamic movements would not participate directly.

Musa al-Zaabout, a Legislative Council deputy from Gaza who was close to Hamas, had already told me he would be willing to participate in the government. However, I was now also able to get in touch directly with the most prominent Hamas leaders. I met Shaykh Ahmad Yaseen, and Abdul Aziz al-Ranteesi, both since martyred for their part in the struggle, as well as Ismail Haniyyah and Mahmoud al-Zahar. During these meetings they emphasised their support for the idea of the government as I had conceived it, and we vowed to refrain from internal conflicts. In Gaza all my exchanges, both with those who wished to participate in the government and others who did

not, were productive and positive. I was very appreciative of the general awareness on all sides of the need to avoid civil strife.

I had to get back to Ramallah from Gaza within 24 hours to attend a meeting of Fatah's Central Committee on 22 September 2003. I confirmed to Fatah that I was not prepared to take sides in its internal squabbles, which were between Fatah officials and regarded whom they would support to be ministers. I was aware that such differences existed, but I had no wish to become involved in them. I was more interested in the principles and aims of the new government than in its precise membership. As for the PFLP and the DFLP, the latter was inclined to participate in the government, which would have been the first time it had done so, but this did not come to fruition on this occasion. It was not clear whether the PFLP would agree to take part, despite my having communicated with its leaders, and in particular its secretary-general, Ahmad Saadat, who was at the time in prison in Jericho. I also continued my consultations with other forces and factions. On 24 September I held meetings with representatives of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, the Network of Civil Organisations, the Palestinian Democratic Coalition, various members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, the Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA) and the Palestinian People's Party. All reacted favourably to my invitation to participate in the government.

On the crucial issue of resolving the confusion that afflicted our security services, I reiterated the need to create a framework for cooperation between them and to return to the basic goal of bringing security to the homeland and its citizens. My hope was that my new government would be able to end the current state of chaos, including the spread of unauthorised weapons which had led to extreme incidents such as rockets being fired at homes of civilians, the stockpiling of explosives in private houses, masked men patrolling the streets and menacing graffiti being written on walls. I had said to Abu Ammar in Ramallah on 20 September, a day before my meetings with the factions in Gaza began, that a key issue was to put an end to anarchy and the illegal storage and use of weapons.

At this juncture, the United States decided once more to intervene. American diplomats had been reporting to Washington regarding the contacts I had made. On 29 September a note sent to us by

the American administration made it clear that there would be no American support for a government that contained any Hamas representatives, or anyone from the DFLP. By way of the European Union, it was made clear to me that financial support could be withheld if there were ministers included in the cabinet of whom the United States disapproved. Even certain Fatah representatives, such as those from the military Tanzim organisation, were also eyed with suspicion by the United States, and, in addition, I blamed myself for having failed to bring the PFLP on board. The upshot was that I felt, finally, that I had to abandon my plans for a broad cabinet and form an emergency government, thus falling in at last with Abu Ammar's favoured temporary solution, in the face of the pressure to which he was being subjected. On 30 September I met President Arafat for a meeting to discuss ways to contain the damage. Abu Ammar, the Central Committee of Fatah and the Executive Committee of the PLO all endorsed the formation of an emergency government with a smaller list of just eight ministers.

On 5 October 2003 President Arafat signed the decree declaring the state of emergency and the formation of the emergency government. At the same time all eyes were on the Muqataa in Ramallah as Israeli threats escalated. On the same day, a group of some 30 international peace activists entered the Muqataa to act as human shields for our leader. Abu Ammar, nevertheless, continued to put on a brave face. From within the wreckage and behind the barriers, as always, he did not fail to inspire the Palestinian people by his qualities of patience and perseverance. His legendary steadfastness aroused feelings of dignity and pride and moved the Arab and Palestinian people to regard what was happening as a rare scene of pure heroism, especially when, speaking by candlelight, he made a courageous statement to the cameras of Al Jazeera television: 'They want me to be a prisoner, an exile or a dead man. And I say to them: I am a martyr, a martyr, a martyr.'

In the midst of all these extraordinary circumstances and turbulent emotions, the intention was that I would put the names of my proposed cabinet before the Palestinian Legislative Council and ask for a vote of confidence for what would be the first emergency government of its kind. On 6 October 2003, before this could take place, I offered my resignation as the speaker of the Legislative Council. Naturally, I could

not combine the position of prime minister and that of speaker of the Council, the post I had held since January 1996. This was a moment of mixed emotions for me, though I was fully satisfied that there was a well-qualified member of the Legislative Council who would take over from me. However, though I was anxious over the new responsibilities that I had taken on, and would rather have led a national unity government as I had imagined it, I understood entirely that there were reasons why the state of emergency had to be declared. The threats facing the Palestinian homeland were unprecedented. Meanwhile, the chaos on the ground and the factional strife could not continue and the standing of the Palestinian Authority was growing ever weaker, with detrimental effects on its ability to function. And finally, the extraordinary personal campaign by Israel against President Arafat could not be tolerated any more. I hoped that with strong government we could resolve some of our difficulties within the month to which the state of emergency was limited by our constitution. Meanwhile, I never lost sight of the importance of the national dialogue I had initiated, with a broad-based government in view.

On 9 October 2003 I was due to propose my cabinet of eight ministers for a vote of confidence from the Legislative Council, which had now been able to assemble with its Gaza representatives participating by video link. Six of my nominees had taken the oath in front of President Arafat, but Major General Nasser Yousef, my choice for interior minister, conscious of his strained relations with Abu Ammar, was anxious to have the backing of the Legislative Council before appearing in front of the President. He therefore opted to wait until after the vote of confidence before taking the oath. One of my ministers, Jawad al-Tibi, could not reach Ramallah because the Israeli occupation authorities had refused to give him a permit to travel from Gaza to Ramallah. Matters were difficult but manageable. The disagreement on one portfolio candidate led to the cancellation of the session. Predictably, what was at issue was my nomination for the post of interior minister, the former security chief Major General Nasser Yousef, who had previously been at loggerheads with the President. These differences were the topic on the agenda of a heated meeting of the Central Committee of Fatah that was hastily convened. I went to the meeting but left abruptly,

demanding that I be relieved of my duties, and retired to my house in Abu Dis, where I stayed in silence, refusing to answer any telephone calls from no matter whom.

I felt that petty personal differences and the settling of scores were leading to renewed attempts from some directions to cause me to fail, and I was not prepared to put up with this. Once more, President Arafat refused to accept my resignation, telling the media that I still enjoyed his confidence despite my differences with him. Nabil Abu Rudayna, Abu Ammar's advisor, issued a statement denying that I had attempted to resign. Other Palestinian officials attempted to make light of reported differences between myself and President Arafat. Meanwhile, discreet attempts were being made to reconcile Abu Ammar and me. All the time, I was conscious of the potential constitutional vacuum that would be created if I persisted in my refusal, at a time when the Palestinian people were facing unprecedented dangers. After two days, on 11 October, I wrote once more to Abu Ammar to offer him my apologies. However, I also explained again that I could not accomplish the task of forming a cabinet that he had given me. As I put it,

I am writing to confirm that I accepted the virtually impossible task of forming a Palestinian government after Abu Mazen's resignation for one reason alone. This was to attempt to lift the state of siege from you, and from our people, as well as to re-establish the Palestinian political system in such a way that you will continue to be its symbol. This is what I have striven in the past few weeks to achieve. I have made some mistakes, but I have at least succeeded in transforming the crisis so that it has ceased to be a clash between Palestinians and has once more become a confrontation between Palestine and Israel. I have dedicated myself to the task and have referred the fundamental decisions to you. I have worked in secret and in public, through meetings and in interviews. However, in light of my failure to remedy this difficult situation, and after much thought, I must inform you finally and definitively that I can no longer undertake this responsibility. I therefore confirm what I said in the letter of resignation I gave you on Thursday 9 October. Without making presumptions, I confirm my readiness to assist you in any other way I am able.

Once more, however, Abu Ammar refused to let me step down. My concerns were far from alleviated, however, and I therefore decided to

take further action. Later on 11 October I summoned my ministers to tell them that, even if I withdrew my resignation as regards the emergency cabinet for reasons of patriotism and loyalty, I did not intend to stay on as prime minister after the emergency period was over. They should therefore be aware that the emergency government would merely be a caretaker administration for the period of a month covered by the decree. My ministers were discontented and angry at this development and said that they would not serve in these circumstances, offering me their resignations. In the end, I persuaded them to stay on with me for the month. Abu Ammar summoned me to a private meeting at his office in Ramallah, where we talked for an hour alone. We were then joined by the members of the Fatah Central Committee, which went into session. In the event, I offered my own resignation and that of my ministers to President Arafat at the end of the Fatah Central Committee meeting, to be effective after the month of the emergency period, in order to give him as much time as possible to choose a new prime minister.

At this gathering of the Fatah Central Committee meeting, however, I was gratified to find that there was much agreement with my position that it was important to form a larger government as soon as possible. We also agreed that we must all try to overcome our differences and concentrate our efforts on minimising the damage inflicted on the Palestinian people. On the following day, 12 October 2003, President Arafat and I reached an understanding that the emergency government would act for 30 days and then be dissolved. Within the emergency cabinet, the National Security Council, a body comprising ministers and other officials that had been previously established to oversee the various security services, would collectively carry out the duties of the interior minister.

On 30 October 2003, in these unfavourable circumstances, President Arafat issued a presidential decree charging me with the responsibility of forming a new post-emergency government to take over from the emergency government when its mandate ended. In his letter, he defined my priorities. In terms of our relations with Israel, I was enjoined to pursue the peace negotiations, demand the fulfilment of signed agreements, and exhort Israel to implement the roadmap. In terms of internal politics, I was asked to consolidate the sovereignty

and unity of the Palestinian Authority and uphold the sovereignty of law, while promoting pluralism in political life and preparing for presidential, legislative and local elections at the earliest possible date. In addition, in the field of administration, I was to continue the planned programme of financial and administrative reform, establishing transparency, accountability and answerability.

I responded positively to President Arafat's request, despite my previous determination not to serve after this point:

Though we may sometimes disagree with you, we never disrespect you. We do not seek either to diminish your authority or to detract from your right, as the guardian of our dream of independence and the leader of our battle for national salvation, to frame our vision, to lay down our policies, and to guide all those who seek shelter under the Palestinian banner towards their common and principal aim until the ship of our state gains the shores of safety, by the grace of God.

Your insistence that I continue to serve as prime minister, and your confidence in me at this difficult time, are sufficient to ensure that as prime minister I will respond completely to all your injunctions. You offer me an opportunity to remedy the latest difficulties in our internal affairs, and to fight the continued Israeli aggression against our people. I shall also [...] pursue the peace process and drive forward the roadmap, implementing the commitments we have made that match those entered into by the Israeli government.

I also promised to fulfil President Arafat's other demands, including restoring the citizens' faith in the Palestinian Authority, with the slogan that none should enjoy immunity before the law, and revitalising the legitimacy of our institutions to pave the way for the younger generation to establish democratic traditions.

In this spirit, I resumed at once my consultations with all Palestinian parties and factions with the goal of establishing a stable government with the broadest possible base, which would include all shades of political opinion, or at least the majority of them. I was spurred on by my deep conviction that there was no alternative to dialogue. In this process, I continued to communicate with Hamas and its leader, Ahmad Yaseen, who was willing to discuss a ceasefire. He affirmed that Hamas stood beside President Arafat against pressure from Israel and the United States. However, despite positive indications from the

Islamic movement that it would re-engage in dialogue, in the end they refused to join the government.

On 2 November 2003, after concluding my consultations, I took a draft cabinet to President Arafat for his approval. I had once more included the name of Major General Nasser Yousef as interior minister and deputy prime minister. I proposed that this ministry would be restricted to administrative and civilian affairs, and brought up the suggestion again that the National Security Council should be in charge of security and public order. Nevertheless, Abu Ammar again objected emphatically to the appointment of Nasser Yousef. Following this, I attempted to defuse this difference of opinion with the announcement that I would appoint four deputies to the position of prime minister. In addition to Nasser Yousef, these would be Salam Fayyad, Nabil Shaath and Saeb Erakat. Abu Ammar, however, continued to refuse to allow the appointment of Major General Yousef, though he conceded that he might be chosen as a member of the National Security Council.

On 5 November, after the emergency period ended, President Arafat asked me to form a new government with a full cabinet of 24 members. Disillusioned by all that had taken place, I once more attempted to refuse. This time in my letter to him I said,

I must remind you of the letter of resignation I sent you on a previous occasion. Regarding your new request that I form a government, I must confirm the following points:

First, I remind you of the resignation of the emergency cabinet whose period of office expired yesterday on 4 November 2003.

Second, I have asked the existing ministers to hand over their ministries to their deputies until a new government is formed, unless you issue a decree requesting us to continue as a caretaker government until the formation of a new cabinet.

Third, in relation to your request that I form a new government, I must regretfully and respectfully inform you that I am unable to comply as a result of differences of opinion between us over certain responsibilities of this government, without which the government cannot succeed. I trust a new government can be formed with which you will be fully satisfied. I must refuse, however, to undertake the duty of forming such a new government.

Abu Ammar once more insisted. However, I was frank with him about the difficulty of continuing with the duty assigned to me, especially after his refusal to accept the nomination of Nasser Yousef had further complicated matters and internal wrangling within Fatah continued unabated. I wrote at length to Abu Ammar to explain my position:

I have truly made every effort to work with the Central Committee of Fatah in a serious attempt to end the state of chaos and to help you to refute those who accuse us of violent terror, while it is they who pursue such practices. I have done my utmost to pursue this policy seriously. As I see it, however, you have continued to doubt my sincerity despite all I have done in word and deed over the past 35 years that I have dedicated to Fatah, and despite all the efforts I have made, in particular in the last two months, to restore the standing and respect for the position of the Palestinian presidency to the best of my powers [...].

I was, however, surprised and shocked at your rejection of my nomination for the post of interior minister of a candidate who has worked with you and has never worked with me. He was your own nominee for that post at the meeting of the Central Committee of Fatah, and became so by their decision. You nevertheless twice rejected him, even in the critical circumstances we face.

When we asked the Palestinian Legislative Council to pass a vote of confidence in the transitional government, which is made up of eight ministers including the nominated interior minister, you disrupted this process and left the Council without there being any discussion of the subject. This caused great resentment and anger among the Council members and the invited delegations. The second occasion came at the end of the emergency period, with the result that we found ourselves with no government and in a constitutional vacuum.

My brother, Abu Ammar, I am frank, direct and honest in my dealings with you. I am loyal to Palestine, to you and to the movement to which I belong [...].

I therefore suggest to you the following alternatives:

1. You accept Nasser Yousef as interior minister, on condition that he works directly for you and that you offer him all the necessary support.
2. We exclude security entirely from the government's remit, in which case you must make it clear that it is your direct responsibility. The duties of the interior would then be limited to administrative matters such as passports, which I can oversee myself.

3. The Fatah Central Committee holds a meeting in my absence, after which they will hand me a list of the ministers they wish to appoint, with whom I will be obliged to work. I am prepared to do this and would present to the Legislative Council the list nominated by the Fatah Central Committee, to which I will give my full backing.
4. Alternatively you ask another brother to form a government and relieve me of this responsibility.

However, Abu Ammar was unmoved. He continued to insist that I form a government, while at the same time he did not cease to object to some of my nominations. This situation was extremely difficult to work with. The result was increasingly strained atmosphere between us. Yet again, I was obliged to offer my resignation. This time, I wrote to him as follows:

Since I was first entrusted with the task of forming a Palestinian government on 5 September 2003, I have made the utmost effort, despite all attempts to belittle my endeavours and to plant the seeds of civil strife [...]. If the task were to be entrusted to the Central Committee of Fatah, I would, as a member of this committee, abide by its decisions regarding the members of the government [...].

With all the conviction and faith that I have, and the experience of which I am proud, and with a clear conscience, I refuse to work in such an atmosphere.

At the end of this lengthy period of internal strife, including attempts by some other parties to obstruct my endeavours to form a new government to succeed the emergency cabinet, I finally accepted that it was my duty to continue to try to form a government, resolving the problems that had arisen from having to accept Abu Ammar's objections to some of my nominations. What finally persuaded me to make every effort to reach agreement with President Arafat was my awareness of my long relationship with him, forged in the Palestinian struggle, and the profound respect I felt for his historic leadership and for him personally. After what we had gone through together, and in light of the bond between us, I was finally unable to refuse him, despite any misgivings I may have felt. Nevertheless, I never abandoned my deeply held conviction that no Palestinian government could succeed without national unity, and that there could be no national unity without an authentic national dialogue.

I therefore took care that such a national dialogue should be constantly maintained, even if I was unable to have the broad spread of ministers I would ideally have liked. I believed that the authority of the PLO was crucially important in healing the dangerous rift that had begun to emerge in the chaotic situation in which we found ourselves. Before I formed a new government, I made a great effort to hold meetings with all possible interlocutors and to continue my dialogue with Palestinian groups, bodies and factions as widely as possible. I also called constantly for the rule of law and for respect for the Palestinian Authority as the sole source of decision making, as well as for the Palestinian Authority and its subsidiary bodies to have the sole right to the possession of arms. On 9 November I attended a meeting chaired by Abu Ammar to discuss these issues. Nasser Yousef sent a letter renouncing his candidature for any position in the forthcoming government. Meanwhile, the question of the appointment of deputy prime ministers was deferred. In this way, we were finally able to agree on a list of ministers.

We also found a way to unify the security services. We agreed that the ministry of the interior would continue to run its own three security organisations, namely the police, the preventive security service and civil defence. We also agreed that there should be full cooperation between the government and the National Security Council, which would include the minister of finance, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of the interior. In addition, Major General Abdul Razzaq al-Majaydeh would be a member in his capacity as the chief of national security, Major General Ahmad al-Hindi as the chief of the General Secret Services, and the prime minister would be able to co-opt any other security official.

I then wrote to Rafiq al-Natcheh, the speaker of the Legislative Council, and I asked for a special session of the Council on 12 November 2003, when I planned to ask for a vote of confidence in my cabinet and my proposed legislative programme. The Executive Committee of the PLO also met to approve the new government. This session was duly held, in the presence of President Arafat. Sixty-eight of the 88 members had to be linked to the meeting by video conference, since Israeli blockades prevented the Gaza members and some others from attending. President Arafat spoke about the difficult times that

the Palestinian people had lived through in the 38 months since the outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada in September 2000. He also reiterated the primary duties of the new government. I then spoke, reviewing the government's programme. I quote here some extracts from this speech:

Brothers and sisters, you know the international and regional situation in which we live in the post-11 September era. You are aware of Israel's attempt to define our national struggle as terrorism. You understand how struggle and terror have been deliberately confused. This is the current reality. It is a reality not of our choosing but we cannot ignore it and we do not have the luxury to rise above it. But we are always able to deal with this reality, not to accept it or to surrender to it, but to strive to change it and to minimise its harmful consequences. We must seize the historical moment. We must not blame others, or ourselves. We must face the state of siege to which we are subjected with steadfastness, in order to achieve our legitimate national rights. We must recruit the forces of peace and moderation to our side, and place the confrontation in the wider context, directing it towards open doors which will not be shut against us [...].

Our government embraces the principles of national consensus and national values approved by the national institutions of Palestine and will not cease to demand our rights [...]. It will not accept the chaos that afflicts all aspects of our daily life. It will not agree to a plurality of authorities. It will say that taking the law into your own hands cannot be ignored and that putting individual interests before the higher national interest cannot be accepted. We say that the chaotic situation that is taking place on the ground now, under our noses, must end as quickly as possible. There will be no more armed demonstrations with masked men parading their power over us, no more terrorising civilians, no more smuggling. We believe in the pluralism of thought, opinion and ideas, but we uphold the unity of authority and decision making.

We seek peace and coexistence, freedom and independence, and national dignity. We are not and will not be terrorists. Our struggle is against occupation, settlement and expropriation, against the expropriation of our land and the most basic of our rights of movement, work, education and health. We have never rejected peace. In fact it is we who have taken risks to achieve it.

At the conclusion of this speech, I also addressed the Israelis:

I tell you in all honesty and sincerity that our people will not surrender, and will not raise the white flag, no matter how harsh your attacks and how brutal and oppressive your power. Building your settlements, and the siege and isolation of Jerusalem, are a wound to our heart that we will never accept. Security can be achieved through peace. Let us seek it with honesty and sincerity. If you embark seriously on this enterprise, then you will find a serious Palestinian partner.

At the end of this session, the Palestinian Legislative Council gave a vote of confidence to my new government, with 48 votes in favour and 13 against, and 5 abstentions. This was a mandate with which I was at last satisfied. I was determined to do my utmost to coordinate with the institution of the presidency, whose incumbent, Yasser Arafat, was after all my oldest friend and colleague.

In the early months of my tenure as prime minister, I made the issue of reform an important central plank of my government's agenda, concerning myself directly with it. I established a broad-based national committee for reform which included representatives from the government, the Legislative Council and the private sector as well as civil society organisations. I also set up and headed a ministerial committee on reform. On 10 May 2004 we announce that local elections should be carried out over the coming year, setting up 36 municipalities for which there would be elections in the first phase.

While all this was taking place, our relations with Israel deteriorated yet further. The Israelis continued to breach the truce that had been agreed with Abu Mazen's government. They showed their determination to complete the process of removing Jerusalem from the equation by fencing it off and isolating it by surrounding it with a chain of settlements. They also continued their construction of the separation wall around Jerusalem and around the Palestinian territories. This split the West Bank into three separate cantons stretching laterally across the territory all the way from the Green Line to the Jordan Valley. This geopolitical measure was aimed, among other things, at establishing unilaterally the Israeli vision of what the situation on the ground should be, ahead of any negotiations, and going further than could be justified by any appeal to security. Israel also carried on evading the implementation of its commitments dictated by the roadmap.

We were also feeling bereft of Arab support. Some countries were failing to fulfil their financial commitments to the Palestinian people, to some extent because of the so-called new international order promulgated by the Americans. The invasion of Iraq had cast a shadow over Arab political life and the 'war on terror' embarked on by the United States had caused a degree of caution towards the Palestinians. Sharon and his colleagues had long sought to characterise us as terrorists, and the new situation gave them the opportunity to press home this charge.

In the early days of my government, I sought to rectify this situation by paying visits to friendly capitals and organisations, whilst maintaining constant diplomatic activity. I visited Cairo, Amman, Riyadh and the Arab League more than once. I met high-ranking officials in fraternal countries and we reached good understandings that they would offer us what support they could to challenge the Israeli siege and halt the outrage of attacks upon us. A number of my ministers also visited the capitals of some Gulf countries, Syria, Lebanon and Tunisia. We believed strongly in the importance of the Arab dimension of Palestine and were careful to intensify our communications with the Arab states in general. Egypt was one country with which we maintained close contact. Discussions with the Egyptian leadership continued over several months with meetings between ourselves and the Egyptian presidency. High-ranking Egyptian officials visited Ramallah to meet President Yasser Arafat. We also continued our intensive efforts to coordinate our efforts with the Jordanian leadership, holding talks on bilateral issues as well as on the implementation of the roadmap. We received the truest support, backing and encouragement for our diplomatic efforts from King Abdullah II. He and his government offered us invaluable advice. My government was also careful to expand our cooperation with Saudi Arabia. I visited Saudi Arabia and I met with King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz and Crown Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, later the Saudi monarch. They were quick to renew their commitment to our cause, and Saudi officials offered economic support, which included financial aid. I am most grateful for the assistance. The Arab League was also always helpful to us. Thanks to our efforts, the Israeli attempt to characterise us on the regional stage as terrorists was unsuccessful.

I should speak particularly about the help we received from Egypt. Omar Sulayman, the Egyptian intelligence minister, came repeatedly to see us, meeting Abu Ammar several times. Egypt's interest was based in part on its concern for the security of the region. However, I must put on record that Egypt took various steps that held considerable risk and for these we were thankful. Egypt, as the largest Arab country, became involved not out of self-interest but to take responsibility. The Egyptians undertook to assist in training for reorganised security services the heads of which had to have no private interests or militias. In the summer months of 2004, Egypt indicated that it was ready to receive any number of trainees we cared to send for a period of six weeks, after which they would return to join the newly reorganised security forces. It must be said that unfortunately there were those who opposed Egyptian involvement. My government nevertheless attempted to take steps to reorganise the security services. We established a single headquarters and attempted to unite the security services, to consolidate their professionalism, and above all to move them away from internal conflict.

I also visited European capitals, meeting high-ranking officials in London, Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Brussels and Dublin, as well as Rome and the Vatican. We also met constantly with high-ranking American officials, such as Colin Powell, the secretary of state, with whom we met in Amman, and Condoleezza Rice, with whom we met in Berlin, together with other senior officials in the White House and the American State Department. We also remained in constant contact with the European Union.

9

DISENGAGEMENT FROM GAZA

The major development in the peace process during the time of my second government was Israel's plan to disengage from Gaza. As early as 18 December 2003, at the fourth Herzliya Conference of Israel's Institute for Policy and Strategy, Sharon floated the idea of a plan to withdraw Israel forces and its settlements from the Gaza Strip. Sharon declared on that occasion that, 'the disengagement plan is not part of the roadmap but it does not contradict it'. Later, Dov Weisglass, Sharon's principal adviser, said: 'After the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the north of the West Bank, we can resume the peace process in accordance with the roadmap'. This was a major change in the direction of Israeli policy, which caused a great internal upheaval within Israel, where the settler movement was deeply opposed to it. It is presumed that Sharon held prior consultations with the American administration before making his announcement. It was to be months, however, before the plan to disengage from Gaza became official Israeli policy. Sharon had first to persuade his Likud party of the wisdom of disengagement, and then to carry it through the Israeli parliament and convince the country of its merits.

At the same time, at a Likud party meeting on 23 February 2004, Sharon made it clear that there had been no alteration in his negative attitude towards the roadmap in practice. He made it plain that the goal of Israel's unilateral disengagement plan in the Gaza Strip was simply to enhance security, and that Israel would also continue to build the

separation wall as well as deploying the Israeli armed forces wherever the government chose. He explained that the disengagement would be calculated to give the impression that it was satisfying American demands, which ought to result in the easing of pressure on Israel by the Americans to make substantial forward moves in talks with the Palestinians. Incidentally, it was also intended to guarantee that more settlements in the West Bank would remain in Israel's hands, since Israel could argue that it had already withdrawn from a substantial amount of Palestinian territory. The conclusion we inevitably drew was that the disengagement plan was intended in fact to obstruct the implementation of the roadmap, so that Israel, having made this gesture, would not be obliged in the foreseeable future to carry out further negotiations with the Palestinians on final status issues. The establishment of a Palestinian state would therefore be postponed into an indefinite future, and the construction of what remained to be built of the separation wall would be carried out, despite international objections.

An incidental objective of the plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip was to diminish the moral pressure exerted on Israel by the international community because it was viewed as an occupying state. Israel was always attentive to its international image and careful to cloak its actions in legitimacy. Though international pressure was not a new phenomenon, it had lately been intensified in international forums. With the disengagement plan, Israel sought to promote the idea that it was no longer an occupying country, transferring all responsibility for Gaza to the Palestinian Authority or in the last resort the international community. In some way, Israel appeared to hope that the West Bank could then be forgotten. As regards international law, however, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are a single entity. Israel itself accepted that when it signed the Oslo Accords. Therefore, the withdrawal from one part of this entity would not exonerate it from the charge of being an occupying power. Even as regards Gaza alone, Israel was proposing to reserve its rights to monitor the external borders of the Gaza Strip, and to control entry and exit, also supervising Palestinian air space; this was open to the legal interpretation that it was still an occupier under the agreed conventions of international law.

The second of Sharon's aims, in embarking on the disengagement plan, was to try to resolve the looming demographic problem that was

threatening the Zionist project by placing a segment of Palestinian territory definitively beyond its frontiers. Despite the success of the Zionist colonisation project and the displacement of a significant portion of the Palestinian people, there remained within the borders of Israel when it was established in 1948 some 80,000 Palestinians, who now numbered around one and a quarter million. After the 1967 war, the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza were added to the total of Palestinians under Israeli control. These now number about four million people in all. We could easily observe the degree of anxiety the presence of these 'others' was causing to those who were concerned with the Jewish identity of Israel and to the Zionist project as a whole. It could be said with certainty that, with the inclusion of Gaza, non-Jews would constitute the majority of the population in Israel by 2020. Until recently there had been two solutions to that demographic dilemma. The first was to integrate the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza into Israel, so that they would become Israeli citizens enjoying the same rights as the Jews. This, however, is rejected by Israel on demographic grounds. The second solution was to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and grant the Palestinians their independence and legitimate rights.

Gaza, however, seemed a simpler task. Sharon's disengagement plan was therefore in essence an attempt to change the arithmetic by removing the 1.5 million Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip from the equation. Sharon intended to divide the Palestinian people, by isolating demographically and politically a third of the Palestinians from those residing in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Further, he was achieving this by giving up only a relatively small area of historical Palestine. Thirdly, for those in Israel who were concerned about the security consequences, he was writing the rules so that he reserved the right to intervene in Gaza whenever he wanted. Fourthly, and most importantly, he was postponing the moment when the Palestinians would form a demographic majority within Israel and the territories it controlled.

His most dangerous objective, however, was to kill off in the longer term the possibility of the establishment of a Palestinian state including both the West Bank and Gaza. The reasoning was that the presence of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank would be sufficient to prevent

the establishment of a Palestinian entity there, despite the agreement of the international community on their illegality. However, Sharon hoped he could have matters both ways by presenting the withdrawal from Gaza as enough to satisfy Palestinian demands. Would it not be unreasonable for the Palestinians to go on demanding a state in the West Bank and Gaza if they had already been offered the Gaza Strip as what he hoped to present as a free gift. In other words, Sharon wanted to take control of future negotiations with the Palestinians on his own terms and to evade the obligations on him that the roadmap brought. He may also have hoped, we suspected, to convince the Americans that there was still an alternative home in Jordan for the Palestinians of the West Bank, who could be told either to remain on Israel's terms or 'return' to Jordan. Basically, his idea was that Gaza would now be the permanent home for the Palestinians, in addition, on sufferance, to a foothold in the West Bank, on condition that Israel had sovereignty over them.

The main challenge for the Palestinian leadership at such a critical moment, therefore, was how to ensure that this was not in fact to be Israel's last withdrawal, and to make it clear that our acceptance of the Israeli disengagement from Gaza would not be the end of our conflict with Zionism but only a step on the road to our ultimate goal. We needed to exploit the increasing international support for the justice of our cause to put further pressure on Israel to take one of two steps. These would be to institute either the 'one-state solution': in other words, to include all Palestinians as citizens of one state of Israel/Palestine, equal in rights and duties to the Jewish citizens, or the 'two-state solution', with Israeli withdrawal not only from Gaza but also from the West Bank, so that we would be able to establish a fully sovereign independent state of Palestine, adjacent to Israel and able to survive and prosper. We also needed to ensure that Israel's withdrawal would occur according to negotiations based on the principles of international law.

Meanwhile, in the international arena there was a variety of reactions to the disengagement plan. The United States gave it strong support. The exchange of letters with Israel that followed the proposal included discussion of some of the final status issues such as refugees and borders, but did not mention Jerusalem. This caused great anger among our people and raised many questions regarding the motivation

of the American administration. We also questioned among ourselves the legality of the authority Washington appeared to have arrogated to itself to grant concessions to Israel affecting legitimate Palestinian rights. We wrote to President Bush to put on record our rejection of any diminution of our rights, or any judgement of issues pertaining to the final status negotiations.

We did, however, give a formal welcome to the proposed disengagement in principle, as we would have welcomed any withdrawal from occupied Palestinian land. It seemed at first to be an opportunity for us to initiate the kind of change we wished to see. Nonetheless, we quickly saw there were conditions we would have to make. These included the following:

1. It should be a real and full Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the specified area of the northern West Bank around Jenin (with the four settlements of Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur), including an Israeli withdrawal from the international crossing points (the Gaza airport, the Gaza seaport and our side of the crossings at Rafah, Carne and Erez).
2. It should include a proposal for a safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with no restrictions on movement between them.
3. The Quartet should adopt the disengagement as part of the roadmap and as a clear and specific step on the road to implementing the roadmap's successive phases.
4. It should be accompanied by a complete cessation of settlement activity and an end to the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, as well as an end to activities that endanger the future of East Jerusalem and threaten its Arab character.
5. Israel should aim to take similar steps in the West Bank, withdrawing its troops to the positions they were in on 28 September 2000.
6. Israel should coordinate fully with the Palestinians in order to avoid any undesirable consequences, especially in the field of security.

We believed that we were facing two principal scenarios from which different sets of consequences might ensue. The first of these was that the withdrawal would be real and comprehensive, and would fall within the framework of a serious negotiating process that would follow the withdrawal and would be calculated to reinforce confidence between the two sides of the conflict. This should reinvigorate the stalled political process. Bilateral talks would ensue that would obviate any

tendency to relapse into misunderstanding and preserve the diplomatic momentum resulting from the move.

On the other hand, the withdrawal might prove to be partial or merely cosmetic and therefore irrelevant to the desired political outcome. It could become evident that the withdrawal had been undertaken in a spirit hostile to the Palestinians, in which case it would not provide a firm foundation for future developments. At worst, it could simply transform the Gaza Strip into a large prison, blockaded by land, sea and air. This would open the way for dangerous repercussions that would result from believing that the national dignity of the Palestinian population was being infringed. We prepared simultaneously for these two alternative possibilities: either a new departure for the Palestinians, or a disaster.

On the basis of my long personal experience, I contended that the withdrawal should be preceded by an agreement on three key political principles, which were:

1. Both Israel and the Palestinians, within the framework of the Quartet, should confirm that the withdrawal plan is an integral part of the peace process and of the roadmap. Its implementation would constitute the roadmap's first phase.
2. An international peace conference should be convened after the withdrawal to establish the basic principle that we should return to the negotiating table and re-establish trust through practical measures on the ground.
3. There should be an agreement in principle to resume the final status negotiations in order to lead to a real end to the conflict. Both sides should commit to this, and it should be guaranteed by the United States and the Quartet.

The disengagement plan had created uproar in Israeli political circles. It came, astonishingly from the point of view of many Israelis, from a man who had always been known for his belief in what was known as 'Greater Israel' and for his policy of imposing new realities on the ground through the constant establishment of settlements, whatever political negotiations might be under way with the Palestinians. Angry voices were heard from the Israeli religious right and the extremist settler movement, calling for resistance to any attempt to uproot the settlers of Gaza from their 'homes'. They complained that the plan

was illegal according to their reading of the Jewish scriptures and they therefore encouraged the Israeli army to disobey any orders they might receive to remove the settlers by force.

Despite many Palestinians also being convinced of the dangers inherent in the plan, the Palestinian Authority continued to declare that it welcomed any Israeli withdrawal from any Palestinian piece of land. What worried us most in the Palestinian leadership was that the plan included a number of stipulations that appeared to infringe our initial red lines. The first of these was the provision that, 'the state of Israel will monitor the external borders of the Strip and will supervise them. It alone will have the right to control the air space and will carry on with its military operations opposite the coast of the Gaza Strip.' A further condition was that the Gaza Strip must be totally demilitarised, which is not a provision one sovereign state has the right to impose on the territory of another, and a third clause added that 'Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defence, including taking preventative steps and responding by force to any threat that may emerge from the Gaza Strip.' The same provisions applied to the small section of the West Bank from which Israel proposed to withdraw.

The plan therefore had the potential to be as far removed as it could possibly be from a genuine restoration of sovereignty to the Palestinians over this particular piece of their land. In addition, Israel was very unwilling to present it as part of a process of seeking a definitive political solution to the long historical conflict between Israel and the Palestinians based on the principles of justice or international law, whether in accordance with the roadmap or otherwise. Nonetheless, we expressed the readiness of the Palestinian Authority to take over responsibility for areas that would be evacuated and we sent Israel a document stating ours terms. We demanded the following conditions:

1. The withdrawal from Gaza should be comprehensive and complete, meaning that all the manifestations of the occupation must end and all its remnants be removed from Gaza and the West Bank as part of the peace process and the roadmap. This will require the evacuation of all settlements and the return of all settlers to Israel, as well as the withdrawal of the Israeli presence from international crossings and

borders and lifting the siege of the Gaza Strip in terms of land, sea and air.

2. Complete responsibility must be transferred to the Palestinian Authority in a systematic way, in the presence of international security forces and monitors, who will supervise all the planned measures and stages.
3. The plan should not be an alternative to the roadmap: it should instead be a first step on the way to a comprehensive withdrawal from the West Bank, including Jerusalem. This will imply the merging of the two plans in a written timetable to coincide with the end of the final status negotiations and the establishment of the Palestinian state in 2005 over all the territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the resolution of the refugee problem according to Resolution 194.
4. Israel must not receive any compensation for its unilateral move in a way that would add legitimacy to the settlements already built in the West Bank, or condone the unilateral definition of borders, or the prejudgement of any such matter pertaining to the issues of the final status negotiations.

We did not want to abandon the optimistic view that if the withdrawal from Gaza were to take place within the framework of the roadmap and with the involvement and supervision of the Quartet, in the presence of international monitors, it could create new impetus for a re-launch of the peace process and the rebuilding of bridges of trust between Israel and the Palestinians that had been broken over the previous four years. However, the doubts I have already mentioned were only increasing over time due to many signs that gave us the impression that the Israeli government was not willing to continue on the path of negotiations. Despite this, we formed a ministerial committee to monitor Israel's plans.

Sharon nevertheless continued to claim, as was his habit, that he was still devoted to the path of negotiations based on the building of confidence through enhanced security. Now, however, he asserted that the extent to which he would abide by any timetable was entirely up to him to decide, claiming that the roadmap did not have a fixed schedule and was only intended to specify what should be done rather than when. Even the Israeli position on the necessity of a ceasefire was indecipherable. Sharon began to say that any action on Israel's part would be entirely conditional on Palestinian performance in security

terms, from week to week, just as right from the start he had always demanded periods of 'calm' before Israel would make any move.

On 14 April 2004, as discussion of the withdrawal continued, President Bush sent Sharon a letter which became known as the 'Letter of Assurance', welcoming the disengagement plan in Gaza. However, in this letter, the American president recognised the right of Israel to keep what he called 'population centers' in the West Bank, saying that what he called 'secure and recognized' borders for Israel would take into consideration 'new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers'. He added that it would be unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations would be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949. This was a sharp turn away from the approach that had been taken by all previous American administrations. In this way, Sharon, in return for the disengagement plan, won an American bid to bestow legality on Israeli settlements that had always been regarded by the international community as illegal. In the letter, Bush nevertheless renewed Washington's commitment to the two-state solution and stressed once more that it should be implemented according to the roadmap. He also, however, specifically repudiated the idea of withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders. Bush also rejected the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes. Instead, he said that what he called a 'just, fair and realistic' solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees would come from 'the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel'. This represented a change from established American policy on refugees and borders. Bush noted that the American administration welcomed the disengagement plan and saw it as potentially making 'real progress' towards the ideas expressed in his speech of 24 June 2002 and as a 'real contribution towards peace'. In reality, Sharon had succeeded in stripping Bush's 2002 promise of the establishment of a Palestinian state of any real meaning, perhaps without the Bush administration even noticing that this had happened. No doubt gratifyingly for Sharon, Bush also reiterated the USA's strong commitment to 'Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state'. The text of President Bush's letter is included in Appendix 1, together with Sharon's reply.

In his response, Sharon as usual placed the stress on security issues. He accused the Palestinian Authority, under the leadership

of President Arafat, of being unwilling to fulfil its commitments under the roadmap, and claimed there was no Palestinian partner for peace. He also reiterated his commitment to the separation wall. In effect the United States and Israel were shelving the roadmap in favour of the Gaza disengagement plan, despite lip service being paid to the roadmap. Sharon purported to be offering concessions on the part of Israel, saying that settlements would be limited, illegal outposts removed and restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Palestinians would be relaxed.

On 15 April, immediately after this exchange of letters, Abu Ammar and I convened a meeting of the Executive Committee of the PLO and a statement was issued about the exchange of letters between Bush and Sharon, which had been made public. The letters, we said, were detrimental to the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people and ran counter to international resolutions, as well as being damaging to stability, security and peace in the Middle East. We also decided to hold wide consultations at the earliest possible date to discuss a full diplomatic response. Meanwhile, on a personal basis, I immediately wrote the following to President Bush:

We believe that the current Israeli position transgresses against the rights of the Palestinians in matters that are at the core of the final agreement between Israel and the PLO and this will not lead to peace. The world agrees that the Palestinian people have legitimate rights according to international law as well as United Nations resolutions and agreements, all of which we believe must be respected. Based on a detailed review of the statements in the press and your Letter of Guarantee, I would like to inform you that we do not see this position as being in line with international law or with the principle of land for peace and the roadmap. The reasons for this are fundamental: the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they lost in 1948 is rejected; the acceptance of Israeli settlements on Palestinian land that has been illegally appropriated from its owners over the past 36 years is accepted; the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem is implicitly allowed, as is taking possession of land by force.

On 4 May 2004 the Quartet met in New York and it urged, as always, compliance with the roadmap. However, it also reacted positively to Sharon's disengagement plan, saying that it welcomed and encouraged such a step, 'which should provide a rare moment of

opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East'. The Quartet added that the initiative, if it brought about a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the complete end of occupation there, could be a step towards the achievement of the two-state vision and open up the possibility of restarting progress on the roadmap. No doubt this apparent endorsement encouraged Sharon in his bid to present the withdrawal from Gaza as a sufficient excuse to drag his feet on other action.

On 11 May 2004 President Bush replied to the letter I had sent him concerning various undertakings and guarantees that the American administration had taken it upon itself to offer Israel that appeared to be at the expense of the national rights of the Palestinians. In his letter, President Bush said:

Thank you for your letter, written just after my meeting with Prime Minister Sharon. I appreciate receiving your thoughts on these issues of vital concern to the Palestinian people, and have delayed replying until after the Quartet meeting and the visit here of King Abdullah of Jordan.

In my remarks of 14 April, I reiterated my, and America's continuing commitment to the vision I announced on 24 June 2002, of two-independent states – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security, and to the roadmap as the route to get there.

As you know, in the years since the 1967 war, Israel has not withdrawn any settlements from territory that will become part of the Palestinian state. Under Prime Minister Sharon's proposal, the government of Israel would withdraw all the settlements in Gaza and several more in the West Bank – the latter a powerful precedent for further West Bank withdrawals. This would be a good step towards preparing for peace and it is in this context that I welcomed Prime Minister Sharon's decision. You will also have seen the Quartet statement of 4 May endorsing the Prime Minister's initiative: 'The Quartet took positive note of the announced intention of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon to withdraw from all Gaza settlements and parts of the West Bank. The Quartet welcomes and encourages such a step, which should provide a rare moment of opportunity in the search for peace in the Middle East.'

If the plan is implemented there is a real chance to move forward towards peace and towards the realisation of Palestinian national aspirations. The building of the institutions of a Palestinian state could

then begin, in earnest, in Gaza. I urge you and your cabinet to seize the moment and undertake practical, positive steps that will meet your roadmap commitments, will make an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank a turning point in this long and tragic conflict, and will truly improve the lives of Palestinians living there.

The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic Palestinian political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civil institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organisations. At the Quartet principals meeting on 4 May, we discussed with the other members of Quartet how to better organize and intensify our collective efforts with the Palestinians and the Israelis to take full advantage of opportunities before us in the coming months.

I stated on 14 April 2004, that the United States will not prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations, including on the borders of the Palestinian state, and I emphasised that all final status issues must still be negotiated between the parties to reach mutually agreed results. This was a matter I discussed in my speech on 24 June 2002 as well, where I said that ultimately, Israelis and Palestinians must address the core issues that divide them if there is to be a real peace, resolving all claims and ending the conflict between them. This means that the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties, based on UN resolutions 242 and 338.

Those negotiations, I believe, must reflect certain realities about the lives of Palestinians and Israelis, the future Palestinian state, and the security of Israel as a Jewish state. There must be an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue.

I look forward to the day when final status negotiations can begin, so the Israeli occupation can be ended and a free, independent and peaceful Palestinian state can emerge.

[...] I believe there are no shortcuts to peace, particularly in light of more than three years of terrorism in the region. This is why the United States is committed to the roadmap, which is a performance-based plan. Just as Israel must meet its roadmap commitments, I urge you to undertake the roadmap commitments made by the Palestinian Authority, which in Phase I include 'calling for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire to end armed activity and all forms of violence against Israelis anywhere', 'comprehensive political reform', 'sustained, targeted, and

effective operations' against terrorism, and 'dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure'.

The road ahead will be difficult, but progress is possible. I am glad you will be meeting Dr Rice on 17 May so that she can answer any questions you may have about US policy and can hear fully your views about how to move forward. The United States looks forward to working with Palestinians, Israelis, peace-seeking Arab countries and with the other members of the Quartet to advance along the roadmap toward a just and lasting peace.

On 17 May 2004, soon after this exchange of letters, I flew to Berlin to meet the American administration's national security adviser as she visited the German capital during her European tour. I held two hours of talks with her at the residence of the American ambassador to Germany. I was accompanied by Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian minister for foreign affairs, Saeb Eraykat, the minister for negotiation, and Hasan Abu-Libdeh, the director of the prime minister's office. Condoleezza Rice was backed up by William Burns, the assistant secretary of state, and Elliott Abrams, the official responsible for Middle East affairs at the National Security Council. I took advantage of the meeting to make a number of points to Condoleezza Rice.

I explained to her that what we now faced was a split between a secular Palestinian entity led politically by the PLO and represented administratively by the Palestinian Authority, and an Islamic Palestinian movement. This Islamic movement dreamed of a return to Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque and enjoyed large and growing support on the ground which was boosted by the unrest caused by Israeli oppression. The clash between these two aspects of Palestinian society had resulted in a boost in the popularity of those who favoured violence and the relative decline in influence of those who sought peace. Our dire economic situation contributed to the further decline in security and had created despair about the peace process.

I explained to her that Egypt and Jordan had offered to help us and that a meeting between the United States and ourselves with the participation of Egypt and Jordan could help us find the way out of our impasse. We were prepared to reconstruct our security services because reform had to start with security and if we were able to refocus our security services to underpin the rule of law and order and to fulfil

our security commitments, then it would be possible, by 2005, to achieve the vision of a two-state solution as envisaged by President Bush. There was still time to achieve that vision.

I reassured her that we were continuing with the process of internal reform and that my position as prime minister was a key element in a reformed administration. In addition, elections were one of our top priorities. We planned to hold local elections over a year, beginning in September in Jericho. General elections were to follow, and we were organising the registration of voters.

In reference to the recent letter from President Bush, I said that with the issues of borders and refugees off the table, our position was intolerably weak. If these issues were to be settled according to Sharon's plans, we would lose half our negotiating objectives before any talks could even begin. I reiterated my position that what we should be talking about were final status issues, with no preconceptions. I told her that I had the support of President Arafat in this.

Condoleezza Rice responded that Sharon's disengagement plan potentially offered historic opportunities that must be seized, and further steps should be taken as appropriate. She said that President Bush was totally committed to his vision of a two-state solution and to the roadmap as the way towards it. The consequences of the disengagement plan, she agreed, were incalculable, but it must be exploited. She then turned to the question of security, pointing to the absence of law and order in the Palestinian territories. She exhorted me to take control of security as the prime minister. She said that the Palestinians must be able to step up to the need to provide security when Israel began its withdrawal from Gaza. She asked how we could guarantee that the prime minister would be responsible for security and that there would be no interference in this. I understood clearly that this was a reference to the role of Abu Ammar and replied as follows:

We have an unusual and unique political system. As a people and a land, we are under occupation, part of our people is under occupation while another part is in the diaspora. We are not an independent state. As a liberation movement, it is important for us to have a symbol and our symbol is Yasser Arafat. We cannot supersede him and we need him to take the difficult decisions that await us. He is the only one able to do so. I believe in him and in our relationship with him. He feels that he is

under siege and that everything is being taken from him, and he therefore wonders why he should be expected to make concessions. He is asking for freedom of movement so that he can move forward.

The disengagement plan was officially adopted by the Israeli government on 6 June 2004, though it was only to be put into action much later, in August 2005. Its result would be to remove all Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip and to evacuate four settlements in areas of predominantly Arab population in the part of the northern West Bank the Israelis called Northern Samaria. This area included Jenin, where the Israeli forces had become badly embroiled during the earlier days of the second Intifada. Later, on 6 October 2004, in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Dov Weisglass appeared to confirm all we had suspected about Sharon's motives when he said, with apparently unashamed cynicism, that the aim of the disengagement plan was in reality to preserve 'in formaldehyde' the peace process as envisaged by the roadmap, in other words to ensure that it would never be enacted. The idea was to take a step that would satisfy the American administration, thus enabling the roadmap to be forgotten. This would ensure, Dov Weisglass added, that the political peace process with the Palestinians would not continue. As he put it: 'when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda.' These were the considerations that in reality lay behind Israel's decision to divert the attention of the international community from the roadmap to the disengagement plan.

After holding talks with Palestinian factional leaders in Gaza in early June 2004, I went to Cairo on 11 June to discuss the Israeli withdrawal with President Mubarak. Egypt was offering military training for the Palestinian security services in the post-withdrawal phase but wanted the twelve existing services reduced to three at most. Egypt was also trying to broker an agreement between the various militant factions, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, on how Gaza was to be run, and was attempting to prolong the currently prevailing *tahdi'a*, or 'calming', which was a period with no violence without there being a commitment to a permanent ceasefire. In an interview I gave in Cairo, I said,

Now we are working on a paper that includes a framework for all the issues. When concluding the dialogue on this paper and when we say that we have had fruitful results, then we can say we have an agreement. The Egyptians want to help us, not just in training but also in rebuilding and restructuring the security forces and unifying them so they will be able to assume all their responsibilities and implement law and order in the areas from which the Israelis intend to withdraw.

On 7 July we came under serious criticism from the Quartet, when Quartet envoys I met with in Ramallah, who included my old friend Terje Larsen representing the United Nations, told me that they were losing patience with the lack of reform. They placed the blame on President Arafat, who was stubbornly retaining control of the Palestinian security services and refusing to take steps to amalgamate them. The Quartet spoke favourably of Egypt's offer of help but I was concerned that I might not be able to provide the right circumstances in which to take advantage of it. By 17 July, keenly aware of the deteriorating security situation in Gaza and my inability to remedy it, I despaired of making progress and once more offered my resignation to Abu Ammar. I felt I was unable to undertake the kinds of reforms demanded of me by the Quartet. President Arafat refused to accept my resignation and would not let me stand down, and on 20 July I agreed to remain on a provisional basis, dependent on whether or not Abu Ammar allowed more power to be devolved to the cabinet.

On 8 September 2004 another sudden crisis exploded between President Arafat and me about whether we should participate in the donors conference which was supposed to be held in New York under the aegis of the Quartet. Abu Ammar thought we should attend. I had asked the Quartet to postpone the meeting because I objected to implications in its agenda that the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza would not be carried out in consultation with the Palestinians. Abu Ammar was furious with me and a bitter argument broke out between us, after which I abruptly left his office and returned to Abu Dis determined to offer my resignation as prime minister. Though Abu Ammar telephoned me that same night, and also spoke to my wife, expressing his confidence in me as well as his trust and affection, I remained steadfast, staying silent in order to avoid our

argument escalating further. To all who attempted to mediate, I said I had given the President an opportunity to find an alternative prime minister. In truth, though the disagreement over New York was the primary cause, I had begun to lose heart over my ability to carry out the reforms and changes that were required of me and to pursue the peace process through the mechanism of the Quartet in the face of Israel's utter contempt for the reality of the required procedures. On 7 October 2004 I gave the director of my office a formal letter of resignation to take by hand to Abu Ammar, but he refused to receive it, signalling instead that he still required me. My office director brought the letter back, but I sent it once more to Abu Ammar through our governmental internal mail system. The essence of my letter was the following statement:

I find myself today having to be frank with you and those whom I address when I speak of this widespread phenomenon of negativity and of my inability to remedy the state of chaos. I have been unable to put a stop to it and I cannot end it. I am unable to prevent a continuing decline. This clear indication that the situation is beyond control has become one of the particular features of this sorrowful period, not only because we lack the means to effect a solution, but because of the fundamental lack of a general national will to rise again, to face up to the decisive confrontation, and to set matters to rights once and for all.

This time, I was unmoved when Abu Ammar called me, asking me not to resign, despite my personal respect and love for him, and prepared to carry out my plan to offer my resignation at the Palestinian Legislative Council session due in October when my government was supposed to report on the first year of its work. This was the last occasion on which I spoke officially with Abu Ammar about Palestinian politics. Only a few days later, he was obliged to isolate himself at his headquarters in the Muqataa when he reached the point of being too ill to receive visitors. Abu Ammar disguised his frailty well, though he was now 75 years old, and we were at first unaware of the rapidly deteriorating state of his health. I discussed the impending Legislative Council session with him and informed him that I had irrevocably decided to take that opportunity to relinquish my post. Before I allowed him to respond, I insisted on telling him that my three basic principles in all my dealings with him were always to be loyal to him, always to be

available to him, and to do my utmost to ensure the success of any government he might choose.

I told him that I was concerned because it had been reported to me that a number of deputies from the Legislative Council had been to visit him a few days earlier and had told him that they would attempt to bring down my government when I presented my report. Abu Ammar had reportedly said to them, 'Do I interfere in the work of the Council?' The implication was that they could do as they chose. From this I had understood that Abu Ammar would not support me were I to be subjected to such a political attack. I was therefore surprised to hear him say, 'Listen Abu Ala, even if the Legislative Council were to agree unanimously to your resignation, I would sever my arm before I signed my approval. I need you and I have great trust in you. I know how you are suffering, but let us continue the journey together. Do not listen to others and do not let me risk this important position.'

At this point, it struck me that this indecision did not represent the Abu Ammar I knew. He seemed to be saying to different visitors what they wanted to hear. I believed that this was a sign of weakness, but even then I did not realise how far his health had declined. I repeated to him that despite anything he said, I intended to go to the Legislative Council to submit my report and to resign as prime minister. His response was to say, 'So the position will remain empty because all of you are now evading your responsibilities; I will not appoint anyone else.'

While all these events were unfolding, I found myself having to deal with the serious issue of the separation wall, which was being built by Israel partially on Palestinian land and isolating occupied Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

When Israel had begun the construction of its wall in June 2002, it immediately emerged as a major problem. The Palestinian observer mission at the United Nations asked for a General Assembly session to be devoted to the issue. Finally, on 8 December 2003, just a few weeks after the formation of my post-emergency government, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution asking the International Court of Justice to examine the legal status of the separation wall in light of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The resolution was passed with the agreement of 90 countries and the

objection of eight, including the United States, with 74 countries abstaining, including the countries of the European Union.

The idea of a wall had first been proposed as long ago as in 2000, in the last days of Ehud Barak's government. In March 2002 Ariel Sharon put the idea into practice. In June, work began on the construction of what Israel called the 'protective barrier' on the pretext of preventing Palestinian attacks within the Green Line. Much of it was built on Palestinian territory within the borders of the West Bank. The wall effectively continued the annexation of Palestinian land, thus preventing the possibility of establishing a viable Palestinian state. The wall deprived the West Bank of about 80 per cent of its groundwater sources, as well as isolating Jerusalem from its environs and effectively annexing hundreds of thousands of acres of agricultural land. It complicated the eventual process of drawing up borders and contributed to the assimilation to Israel of the settlements that had been unilaterally constructed on Palestinian land and inside Jerusalem.

As the separation wall was eventually completed, it ran close to the Green Line but frequently diverged in order to include on the Israeli side settlement areas of substantial population such as Ariel, Gush Etzion and Maale Adumim as well as others. It is seldom less than 200m from the Green Line. By November 2003, the barrier enclosed most of the northern and western borders of the West Bank. In February 2004 the Israeli government said it would review the route of the barrier in response to international and Palestinian concerns. Israel's construction of the separation wall took place in three phases. The first stage ran for 360km from the village of Salem in the extreme north of the West Bank to the town of Kafr Qassem in the south. In this section, the height of the wall is approximately 7 to 8m. The second phase stretched for approximately 45km from the village of Salem to the town of al-Tayaseer on the borders of the Jordan Valley. The third section, whose line was defined by the Israeli ministry of defence, was planned to stretch from the settlement of Ilkna to the Dead Sea. This section of the wall would be more substantially built than the two previous phases inside the West Bank, taking a route which would leave most of the settlements on the western side of the wall. According to statements made by Ariel Sharon, this phase would separate the Jordan Valley from Palestinian population centres.

This supported the belief that the final intention was to extend the wall towards the south, so that the Jordan Valley would be entirely separated from the rest of the land in the West Bank.

We spared no effort in opposing the construction of the wall. We brought it up in all our meetings with Ariel Sharon and drew attention to its dangers in all our contact with foreign diplomats. I set up a Palestinian observation group that published a daily report in Arabic and English, and was widely distributed locally and internationally, to bring Israel's daily violations to the attention of observers, diplomats and the media. In meetings with delegations from abroad, and with Arab and foreign dignitaries and officials, we did not fail to raise the issue. We monitored the impact of the separation wall on the lives of Palestinian citizens and prioritised the welfare of Palestinian areas that were threatened by the wall.

On 28 January 2004 Israel sent a lengthy submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, detailing the bombings and other attacks to which Israel had been subjected, and arguing that Israel was not obliged to recognise the Court's authority to discuss the separation wall. The document also included a detailed justification of the wall in terms of Israel's security requirements. Israel continued to consider whether or not to send representatives to The Hague to argue its case.

We also tried to bring the question before Israel's own legal authorities. On 9 February 2004, the Israeli High Court examined a number of petitions put forward by Palestinian and international human rights organisations against the separation wall. Presented to the High Court were six reports that drew attention to the grave detriment that the wall caused to the lives of Palestinians and confirmed that 'the line followed by the wall had a damaging effect on the Palestinian population in economic and social terms, affecting 800,000 people. The wall separated families as well as citizens from their land.' The Israeli Attorney General replied that the petitions were political in their intention and that the High Court should not receive them. However, he added that 'the Israeli government was researching the possibility of changing the line of the wall, especially in relation to the sections not yet constructed.' The Israelis did in fact propose some small modifications, removing the more extravagant loops round

certain Israeli settlements. The intention of this was to gain American support for the project.

As the likelihood grew that there would be a judgement by the ICJ that would be unfavourable to Israel's plans, the Israeli government declared itself determined to complete the construction of the wall despite its referral to the court. An opinion poll in Israel showed that the majority of the Israeli population supported the wall. This poll, published by the newspaper *Maariv* at the beginning of February 2004, showed that 53 per cent of Israelis believed that Israel should continue to build the wall even if the price was economic sanctions imposed on their country by the United Nations. On 11 February, while visiting India, the Israeli foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, told journalists that 'Israel might boycott the hearing to be held by the International Court of Justice on the separation wall.' Subsequently, Sharon decided that Israel should keep away from the court hearing. The decision was based on legal advice that the written evidence Israel had already sent the ICJ would suffice. Ariel Sharon did not want an Israeli delegation to be humiliated by the court.

Instead the Israelis took a different direction at the ICJ. The Israeli foreign ministry promoted a media campaign to justify the wall. An unofficial delegation went to The Hague, including members of the families of some of those killed in bombing attacks. They also planned to send the remains of a bus that had been bombed in Jerusalem on 29 January as an exhibit. There would be a factual video with gruesome footage of the bomb attack. The intention was to shock the world and demonstrate the need for the separation wall. The Israeli government knew it was fighting a losing battle for international public approval. However, it was keen to ensure the backing of the United States, its major ally. Silvan Shalom was clear that the goal of Israel's strategy was to distract Western public opinion from the injustices arising from the wall and to focus attention on terrorism. 'We are in The Hague not to talk about the wall, but to talk about terrorism,' he said, 'so that the world can understand what is the primary and only reason which made us build this wall.'

In the weeks that preceded the opening of the ICJ proceedings, Washington tried to engineer a compromise. Though the United States had resigned itself to the construction of the separation wall, it did not

endorse its construction on Palestinian land. Israel's counter argument was well calculated to appeal to American instincts, which were always wary of any international body that presumed to have jurisdiction over American interests. An Israeli memorandum addressed to the American administration argued, 'what will be discussed at The Hague is not the approval or otherwise of the Wall, but whether the ICJ is to be transformed into an authority competent to rule on political questions. This would challenge the global position of the United States.' The Americans were easily swayed by this argument. In February 2004 American diplomats made the case that the ICJ should not be competent to rule on any political issue, and attempted to gain the backing of the European Union on this position. When this tactic failed, the United States backed Israel's decision to boycott the ICJ, urging the court not to rule on the legality of the wall. The American contention was that such a ruling against Israel would be destructive of peace efforts in the Middle East.

On 23 February 2004, when the ICJ's deliberations opened, the Palestinian delegation forcefully put our case. The reply from Israel came swiftly, in the form of a strongly worded statement claiming that, 'if the court were to issue a decision on the legality of the separation wall, this would demolish the roadmap.' The statement also expressed Israel's view that, 'the hearings of the ICJ on the legality of the separation wall in the West Bank are biased and fail to consider Palestinian terrorism.' The statement added, 'the Palestinian arguments before this court confirm the apprehensions of several states in relation to the biased nature of the case being examined by the court, which seeks to prosecute the measures taken by Israel against terrorism, instead of prosecuting the terrorists themselves.' The statement went on to say that the deliberations in front of the ICJ had considered only the rights of the Palestinians and had ignored the right of Israeli citizens to live unmolested. Israel declared that whatever the outcome might be, it would continue to construct the wall, in defiance of a court ruling if necessary. From 23 to 25 February, the ICJ heard the arguments of both sides and of other parties. The judges then began to consider the written documents presented to them in order to reach a decision after some months of deliberation. Israel did not wait for a decision to be announced, but

began to attempt to put pressure on the judges, even claiming that an Egyptian judge should be disqualified from participation because of personal bias.

On 9 July 2004 the ICJ ruled that the Israeli separation wall in the West Bank was illegal. The ruling was passed by a 14–1 vote of the court's 15 judges, and the dissenting voice was that of the American judge, Thomas Buergenthal. The court demanded that Israel should remove the sections of the wall built on Palestinian land, in practice some 200 km of the 700 km that had been constructed. It also called for compensation for any Palestinian citizens who had suffered losses from its construction, owing to the expropriation and demolition of property or damage to farms. The court also ruled that the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip were to be regarded as occupied territories to which the Fourth Geneva Convention was applicable, prohibiting the transfer of population and any deliberate demographic change, as well as the appropriation of land by the occupiers. We took the opportunity to redouble our efforts to try to integrate Jerusalem into the Palestinian territories. The ICJ recognised Israel's right to defend itself, but took the view that this right could not be used to bestow legality on the construction of the wall.

After the ICJ judgement, our legal position was strong. Israel was quick to see that it faced a crisis that could leave it further isolated in terms of international public opinion. The Israeli government's own legal advisers said it should not attempt to simply ignore the judgement of the court. As for the Palestinians, we welcomed the court's decision, and President Yasser Arafat declared it a 'victory' for the Palestinian people. He told journalists at a press conference in Ramallah, 'We praise the decision that condemns the racist wall. This decision is a victory for our people and all free people and freedom movements all over the world.'

In terms of international reaction, the Arab League said the court's decision was a victory for international law. 'Now, after the legal aspect has become clear, the international community has to look at appropriate ways to compel Israel to respect international law,' the League's spokesperson said. The European Union Middle East envoy drew attention to previous European demands for the removal of the wall and noted that they were vindicated by the judgement of the ICJ.

As for the American administration, however, the story was entirely different. The White House press secretary, Scott McClellan, said the United States regarded the ICJ judgement as 'inappropriate'. The spokesperson confirmed once more that Washington believed the issue to be political and therefore beyond the ICJ's jurisdiction. Israel, of course, ignored the court's ruling and continued with the construction of the separation wall as it saw fit.

10

THE DEATH OF ABU AMMAR

On 25 October 2004 President Arafat was suddenly taken ill during a meeting and was placed at once under medical observation. On 27 October, there was a rapid deterioration in his health on the very eve of the session of the Legislative Council at which I had intended to step down, about which I had spoken to him. As soon as I heard the bad news, I rushed to the Muqataa, together with other colleagues from Fatah and the PLO, to see the situation for myself. When we realised how seriously ill he was, and when worrying symptoms began to be observed, we summoned his doctors. Abu Ammar had stopped making light of his illness and had ceased trying to persuade us it was trivial. He had been ill before, but it was clear that this time things were different.

I immediately telephoned Abu Mazen. Since leaving office just over a year before, he had isolated himself in his home, and had long refused to meet with Abu Ammar. I told him that the President's situation was critical. Abu Mazen came at once to the Muqataa. All of us were beginning to feel a renewed sense of solidarity from the difficulty of the circumstances. Everyone needed reassurance. I was becoming more worried by the hour and my fears only grew when I went in to see the President. I sat by his bedside, together with Abu Mazen and Abu Nizar (Sakhr Habash), and with Abu Ammar's wife, Suha, who had returned to be with him from Paris, where Abu Ammar had sent her at the outbreak of the second Intifada. In the enclosed space of his

small room at the Muqataa, there was an atmosphere of foreboding. Abu Ammar's face bore an expression that I had never seen before. He was very pale and his voice was weak. It had been Abu Ammar's habit to ignore minor ailments and work through them, despite his age. This was clearly more serious.

The news from Abu Ammar's private physician, Dr Omar Dukka, and from the other Palestinian doctors who were part of the team treating him, all pointed towards a grave illness. His personal bodyguards, who knew him better than anyone, were alarmed at his condition. Meanwhile, despite everything, Abu Ammar was refusing to acknowledge his discomfort and was doing what he could to reassure us, continuing to try to talk about the political situation as if everything was normal. Each of us tried to help in our own way. For my part, as prime minister, I placed a telephone call to Ariel Sharon and spoke directly to him to ask for an assurance that Abu Ammar could be removed from the Muqataa and that he would not be prevented from returning there. Sharon said he would be allowed to return. I also asked for Arab medical specialists from Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan to come quickly to help diagnose his condition and assist his Palestinian doctors in making the necessary decisions. At the same time, like all of us, I had failed to appreciate how quickly his health could deteriorate.

The affairs of politics were still with us, however. Clearly, I could not read my own speech at the Legislative Council under these circumstances, and there was a question over how I should proceed. I was in turmoil over the wisdom of my earlier decision to resign given the new circumstances. I was so moved by our President's dignity and determination while he was beset by his rapidly deteriorating illness that all I could think of was the life he had spent devoted to the idea of Palestine. I therefore decided, out of respect for Abu Ammar, to make a quite different proposition in my resignation speech. I would recommend that the Legislative Council should consider revoking the constitutional amendment that had established the position of prime minister and that the constitutional position should return to a presidential constitution in which President Arafat's authority would once more be unchallenged. I was consumed by the vision of the long years during which Abu Ammar had thought of nothing but Palestine, ceaselessly travelling, reconciling warring and impatient Palestinian

factions, and working through the night, poring over endless documents by the light of his desk lamp while all about him slept. This was not, of course, to be.

We all agreed that the President should be sent abroad for treatment. Abu Ammar agreed to the move. I received a call from the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, expressing his concern and anxiety and offering to receive Abu Ammar in Saudi Arabia for treatment or to provide a fully equipped Saudi medical aircraft to take him abroad to wherever we might decide. At the suggestion of Suha Arafat, and with Abu Ammar's agreement, we chose to send him to France. I called Laila Shaheed, the Palestinian representative there. She took action at once and obtained the approval of President Chirac. Even after we had taken the decision to move him quickly to France for treatment, we did not think for a moment of the bigger question, that he might be leaving us forever. All our efforts were focused on practical matters: arranging his transport and guaranteeing his return. Abu Ammar himself was confident that he would recover and his own optimism in his ability to overcome his illness contributed to the incongruously positive atmosphere. We had become so used to his presence that we had blind confidence in his ability to come through any crisis unscathed. Our belief in his indestructibility prevented us from recognising that he was in the end just a human being who lived and died like the rest of creation, and that he had a fate from which there was no escape.

In the end, our beloved president left his besieged headquarters at the Muqataa in Ramallah at 5 a.m. on the morning of 29 October to fly on board a Jordanian helicopter to Amman. As Abu Ammar left, I issued a public statement to the Palestinian people, in the homeland and outside, in my capacity as prime minister, that called for fortitude and patience:

We are passing through hard times. The moment is difficult and the trial is severe. Our Palestinian strength of character will be tested by anxiety and waiting. This is a time which will test our will and our ability to rise to a period of great challenge. The world will look to see how this people will act and if they will perform their national duty well. Let us show the world how we will be: solid, united and proud in the face of adversity, just as in all the previous tribulations surmounted by our people.

Abu Ammar was accompanied by his wife and Dr Dukka. He was still able to walk, but his weakness was visible. From Amman, he was to fly aboard a French military aircraft to Paris, where he would be taken to the Percy Army Teaching Hospital in Clamart, near Paris. I was with a number of other officials at the Muqataa to say goodbye to the President, and at that moment I could not stop myself from weeping. When Abu Ammar left Ramallah, we still failed to accept that this period had been the last time in his life he would be in Palestine. Abu Mazen presided over a meeting of the Executive Committee of the PLO, which I attended as did my successor as speaker of the Legislative Council, Rawhi Fattouh. The chair in which Abu Ammar usually sat remained vacant. We considered as best we could the potential consequences of the enormous events that were taking place. Our conclusion was that stability would be best served by Palestinian institutions continuing to operate as normal. Abu Mazen made a statement, which was as follows:

Some of those brothers who have met today, including myself, have worked under the leadership of the President for 40 years. We continue to work with him, whether within the framework of the PLO, our people's only legitimate representative and the protector of their independence, or in his own pioneering movement, Fatah, which has always been the greatest guarantee for the protection of our national goals.

With hearts full of pain over the absence of our brother, Abu Ammar, but also overwhelmed with hope for his rapid return, healthy and well, with God's permission, to his land and his homeland, so that we may continue our progress and achieve for our people and the coming generations their dreams of freedom and independence, our meeting has come to the following conclusions:

The work of all leadership institutions within the framework of the Palestinian Authority will continue, according to the regulations and laws that define their roles and responsibilities. This means the Palestinian government will continue to play its part and carry out its duties according to the responsibilities and authority assigned to it by the law. The National Security Council will continue its work and the Legislative Council will carry on with its duties, with no interruption or impediment.

This continuity is the will of President Arafat. We support his wish, particularly in the light of tragic circumstances suffered by our people

[...]. These circumstances oblige the leadership institutions to carry out their roles and to reject any confusion or diminishing of these roles.

The Executive Committee of the PLO, collectively and in permanent session, will be vigilant to guarantee that the Basic Law of the Palestinian Authority continues to be respected, and that all legitimate, executive and judicial bodies carry out their duties accordingly. The Executive Committee will also ensure that the Palestinian government and Prime Minister will meet whenever the need arises. The leadership will continue to meet all factions in order to guarantee national unity.

The Executive Committee will continue to consult President Arafat and will receive his instructions. He is our leader in this journey and its symbol, the president of the PLO and the president of the Palestinian Authority. As an organisation and an authority, we will continue on the road to secure the right of our people to establish their independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital, and to guarantee the rights of refugees from among our people as confirmed by international law.

We send our deepest gratitude to the great Palestinian people for the overwhelming love with which they have surrounded their leader. We ask Almighty God to cure him from his illness and bring him back to his people, to his cause and to his struggle, where he is missed and needed. We ask all forces and factions within the Palestinian people to stand together and work together, with the highest sense of responsibility, to safeguard our national destiny and to preserve it from all harm. We express our thanks and appreciation to all leaders and responsible officials, both in the Arab world and in the world at large, for their concern and compassion, and for all the forms of support that they have given us, and in particular for the sympathy they have shown towards President Arafat.

Demonstrating our determination to carry on as normal, I asked the Legislative Council to convene as expected for the scheduled meeting to hear my report on the government's work in its first year. Hoping to inspire the members of the Legislative Council, and to alienate concern and avoid potential dissent, I read a statement on behalf of the government, which was as follows:

I have prepared my report on the government's work in its first year [...]. I was meant to read this detailed statement before you at this session. But the development that forced its way onto us a few days ago, when President Yasser Arafat's health obliged us to move him abroad for

treatment, means we must set aside the annual report for the time being to avoid exchanges of opinion that might not be in the interests of the government, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people during these difficult times. Permit me, therefore, to put away the report I have prepared and to say instead these few words expressing our profound anxiety over our future. I will leave my detailed reports in written form for any member who seeks further information.

Allow me here to focus on the future rather than on the past and to look at the challenges that we face [...]. We must be more cautious and attentive to our achievements, and to continue with the construction of our nation. This is a moment of hardship, certainly, but it is a moment to summon up all our strength and energy to do the right thing.

The journey in which we have been led by Abu Ammar, our president, has not reached its destination. It has not achieved the goals we have set for ourselves. But we are close; we are just a single stone's throw away from the walls of Jerusalem no matter what the doubters say. We understand the danger of the loss of the father of the Palestinian revolution. He was our leader, the guardian of our dream, and the one to make the first call for the Palestinian rising, at a time when it seemed like an impossible dream [...]. He saw the light at the end of the tunnel at a time when ordinary eyes could not perceive it, and he always said, 'They think it is far, but we see it is close and we are steadfast.'

We are facing a tyrannical and continuous occupation, which is trying to crush our will [...]. For this reason, we today, all with no exceptions, will not allow the occupiers to seize an opportunity to tighten their grip upon us. We must also hold onto our national values with a visionary strength [...].

Come, my brothers and sisters, let us prepare the way, let us stand together and unite to overcome this difficult period for us all [...]. This is a moment of truth, and truth is always harsh. It is no doubt a time of hardship, but with God's strength we shall meet the challenge.

The news that came to us from Paris about the condition of Abu Ammar, over whom Suha Arafat was keeping watch, was not encouraging. We heard nothing from the French medical team, who, because of patient confidentiality, would speak only to his wife. Abu Ammar telephoned me on 7 November and though he overwhelmed me with the expression of his personal sentiments the call was not reassuring. Fatah's Central Committee decided that day to ask Abu Mazen and myself to go to Paris to find out at first hand what was

happening. We were told that at least one of us would be admitted to Abu Ammar's room, no matter what his condition. We had intended to set off on 8 November, but Suha Arafat didn't react favourably to our plans and we postponed our departure. By 9 November, we could wait no longer and I therefore travelled to Paris with Abu Mazen. We were accompanied by Nabil Shaath and Rawhi Fattouh. Abu al-Lutuf (Farouq al-Qaddoumi) and Abu Maher, who had come from Tunis, had already arrived. We went first to our hotel, which was close to the hospital, and Abu Mazen personally met the cost of our expenses. Others had also gathered to wish Abu Ammar well. I recall that among them was George Hawi, the secretary-general of the Lebanese Communist Party.

From the hotel, we went straight to the hospital, where our arrival was expected. We met the French medical team, which included the director of the hospital and the doctors supervising the treatment of Abu Ammar. We were joined by Suha Arafat, as well as by Ramzi Khouri, the director of Abu Ammar's office, and by Yousef, his personal bodyguard. On our arrival, Suha spoke to us in a bitter and emotional manner, accusing us of hastening to inherit the mantle of Abu Ammar, with no concern for him as a person. She said we were gathering like vultures and were seeking to carry out a coup d'état. We excused her outburst, as she was going through a difficult emotional time as were we all. When we asked to visit the President's room, only one of us was allowed to enter, due to the severity of his condition.

My colleagues decided that I should be given this responsibility, but I was reluctant to assume it. Suha Arafat was with me, together with Ramzi Khouri and Yousef, the bodyguard, as well as Dr Omar Dukka. As soon as I entered the room in the hospital's intensive care unit, I grasped how desperate Abu Ammar's condition was. He was connected to monitors and drips, unconscious, visibly extremely unwell, and he was a shadow of his former self. Something about his face told me that his death would be imminent. The moment was so frightening that, blinded by my tears, I fainted. I literally stumbled and fell to the ground. Suha and Dr Dukka called urgently for someone to come to take care of me. Ramzi Khouri and Yousef, the bodyguard, dashed in to take hold of me, raising me to my feet. These two close aides of Abu Ammar guided me out of the room in the intensive care

unit and back along the corridors to the lobby where the Palestinian delegation was waiting for me. I had found myself face to face with the reality of our leader's impending death, and the emotion had been too strong for me.

I told my brothers what I had seen. Then French doctors from the medical team came and offered us what guarded reassurance they could. We then left the hospital in silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts, to go to the Élysée Palace, where we were received by President Chirac. We thanked the French leader for his courtesy and for the exceptional care he had taken to provide Abu Ammar with the best possible treatment. Evidently, the moment of truth had arrived and we were in the hands of God. On 11 November 2004 President Yasser Arafat, the symbol of our state and our people, passed away. He left behind him a rich tradition of struggle on behalf of our people, but also a position that none of us felt able to fill. The responsibility we faced was one that mountains could scarcely bear. His death was officially announced in a statement made by al-Tayyib Abdul Rahim, the secretary general of the Palestinian presidency.

Our duty was then to return quickly to the homeland to make all the necessary arrangements for the funeral and burial. We flew from Paris to Amman and then immediately to Ramallah. We elected Abu Mazen as PLO chairman to replace Abu Ammar that same day, in order not to have a vacuum of authority. The first practical question was to decide how our late leader was to be buried. Our first thought was to bring his remains back to the Muqataa headquarters in Ramallah as a temporary resting place until he could be moved to Jerusalem, the place his heart had always desired and of which he had never ceased to dream. But though Ariel Sharon agreed that President Arafat's body could be brought back to Ramallah, the Israeli government would not accept that he could be buried in Jerusalem, where his tomb would become a shrine. In addition, the question of arranging a funeral in Ramallah that could be attended by as many foreign dignitaries as would wish to be there was difficult. We accepted a generous offer by the Egyptians to hold an official funeral in Cairo that would be commensurate with the dignity of the late leader of the Palestinian people. President Hosni Mubarak reminded us of Abu Ammar's strong connection with Egypt, where

he had lived when he was young, grown to manhood and received his education. The French government lent its unstinting and welcome aid to make this possible.

After President Chirac had paid his last respects to our late leader at the hospital, President Arafat's body was taken by military helicopter to the airbase at Vélizy-Villacoublay, south of Paris. France's prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the French foreign minister, Michel Barnier, and other French officials attended a short ceremony at the airfield, with his widow, Suha Arafat, standing by. Then a full military guard of honour carried the coffin to a French military aircraft which flew his body to Cairo. After the ceremony in Cairo, which was organised by the Egyptian government and attended by international leaders and dignitaries, Abu Ammar's second funeral in Palestine took place in his own compound in Ramallah. This was more an affair for the Palestinian people, where their emotions could be given full rein. Hundreds of thousands crowded around the coffin and impromptu popular funeral rites accompanied his interment. Earth from the al-Aqsa Mosque was sprinkled on his coffin, and an inscription at his grave expressed his wish that his last resting place should be Jerusalem, the city of his dreams. We immediately set in motion the construction of a memorial and a museum in his memory.

An issue that could not be ignored because of the questions that were being asked everywhere and the rumours that were flying around, was the nature of the illness that had befallen Abu Ammar and that had led to such a rapid deterioration in his health in the few weeks before his death. The military doctors in France, who had conducted extensive tests, had failed to reach a conclusion. The rumour that spread like wildfire after his death was that he had been poisoned by some substance unknown to the French medical team. After President Arafat's funeral, this story was widespread in the Arab street and throughout the Arab world politicians, commentators and journalists spoke of nothing else. The Palestinian government set up a committee headed by Nasser al-Qudwa, the minister of foreign affairs, to investigate the truth about the death of the President. The question was, had Israel been able to poison Abu Ammar with a special substance? Even some of the Israeli newspapers began to claim that Ariel Sharon had asked his security services to do so. There had

been no autopsy after President Arafat's death, and no conclusion was ever reached. It must not be forgotten while considering this issue that Abu Ammar had reached the age of 75.

Before Abu Ammar's death, while he was still in hospital, we had already used our time, despite our grief, to devise an efficient constitutional mechanism to ensure a smooth succession in the case of his apparently imminent death. We had agreed that, in accordance with the letter of the law, the speaker of the Legislative Council, Rawhi Fattouh, would take over the presidency for 60 days, according to clause 37 of the Basic Law, while the election of a new president was carried out. A few hours after President Arafat's death, Rawhi Fattouh swore the requisite constitutional oath and took over the position of president of the Palestinian Authority on a temporary basis. Once in office, Rawhi Fattouh declared 9 January 2005 as the date for elections to be held in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem to choose a new president for the Palestinian Authority. This date was precisely 60 days after President Arafat's death. Rawhi Fattouh also announced that elections for a new Legislative Council would be held on 17 July 2005, four years after the date of the elections that had been scheduled for 2001 but had been deferred due to the outbreak of the Intifada. The calmness with which we were able to proceed did not go unnoticed, especially in the United States.

We also needed to settle the issue of the leadership of the PLO, as Abu Ammar had of course also been the PLO's historic leader. On 11 November 2004 the Executive Committee of the PLO met and those present verified that there was a quorum, which included the four votes of those members who were outside Palestine. I discussed the question of Abu Mazen's nomination with Abu al-Lutuf (Farouq al-Qaddoumi), the Palestinian foreign minister, who was one of the most senior and most influential members of the Executive Committee and the head of its political affairs department, and who had already automatically succeeded Abu Ammar as the secretary of the Central Committee of Fatah. Our discussion was chaired by Abu al-Adib (Saleem al-Zanoun), the president of the Palestinian National Council, with myself and Abu Nizar (Sakhr Habash), a member of the Central Committee of Fatah, also present. In this debate, it was Abu al-Lutuf who insisted on the nomination of Abu Mazen for the

presidency of the Executive Committee of the PLO. In the end, Abu Mazen was the only nominee and all present voted for him. Abu al-Adib then announced that the Executive Committee of the PLO had elected Abu Mazen as its new president after the passing of President Yasser Arafat.

Following this, on 22 November the Central Committee of Fatah unanimously chose Abu Mazen as its nominee for the post of president. The nomination was also put before the Revolutionary Council of Fatah and all the other organisations within the Fatah movement to ensure there would be no opposition. Zakariyya al-Zubaydi, the leader of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the military wing of Fatah, said the Brigade would back Fatah's nominee and would then support the leader legitimately chosen to be president of the Palestinian Authority. The al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in Gaza also announced their support for Abu Mazen, as did the Fatah deputies in the Legislative Council and Fatah's Youth group. On 25 November 2004 the Revolutionary Council of Fatah gave its unanimous approval to the decision of the Central Committee to nominate Abu Mazen as a candidate in the presidential elections. Finally, on 12 December 2004, the road was left clear for Abu Mazen by the withdrawal of Marwan al-Barghouti, a Fatah activist and popular Palestinian deputy who had been imprisoned by Israel, who had announced on 1 December that he would run as an independent candidate. Al-Barghouti said he would throw his support behind Abu Mazen, explaining that he had intended through standing as a candidate for the post of president to send a challenge to Israel and to assert the status of prisoners as freedom fighters. Thus, the Fatah movement entered the presidential elections with a single candidate, behind whom all wings of the movement stood.

Of course, in spite of the difficult times we were all going through, diplomatic affairs continued relentlessly. After Abu Ammar's death, Colin Powell paid a last visit to the Middle East as secretary of state. He had already announced his resignation and it was known that his successor was to be the former American national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, who would take up the post on 26 January 2005. On 23 November 2004 Colin Powell came to see me in Ramallah. He told me that the reason he had asked for a meeting with me in

particular was that at such a delicate moment he was keen to hear my point of view, my assessment of the situation and my judgement on what needed to be done next. I told him that much depended on his visit and on his wise counsel as he approached the end of his time in office.

There are huge efforts to destroy the peace process, I explained, and the Palestinian people look to you for hope and for an end to the scandalous aggression they suffer. They expect you to achieve something important that will help to save the peace process. The chance is there. I met you in Washington last January and I told you that we are ready to make an effort, but we want to see light at the end of the tunnel. When President Bush announced his historic vision of an independent Palestinian state, side by side with Israel, this gave us optimism, and after our long suffering we deserve some hope. I do not know what the Israelis intend now as regards the roadmap. Do they accept it? Or do they want to destroy it, or change it? Do they want to implement it, and if so in what form? Sharon's public position is that he wants it, 'but' [...]. And the word 'but' means a lot in Sharon's lexicon. It signifies his intention to paralyse and transmute. All Palestinian institutions, including the Executive Committee of the PLO and the Central Committee of Fatah, have officially declared their acceptance of the roadmap, a decision that was not easy for all the Palestinian organisations to endorse. This is why we have welcomed the American decision to stick to the roadmap without any amendments and we look to your visit to put it into action. It is important and necessary for Israel to accept it as well. Israel must also declare its acceptance of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian state. On our side, we have reiterated our recognition of Israel's right to exist.

I reminded him that we on the Palestinian side had already begun to implement measures and issues provided for in the roadmap. The Basic Law had been amended and a prime minister with real power had been appointed. We had also drawn up the draft of an amended constitution. I also said to him:

We have carried out an important series of reform measures in the financial sector and the public budget, and we will carry on with our work on that aspect. On security, we are working tirelessly to impose the sovereignty of law and a unitary authority and to control the

bearing of arms. However, it would be difficult for us to enter into armed confrontation and civil war between ourselves, indeed that is something we will not accept, so we must take the path of dialogue. Our understanding is that peace comes with security, but security without a comprehensive understanding will not bring peace. In any case, when the peace process gets back on track and the talks begin, with your support, dialogue will become easier. There are many who are relying on you and I am glad that you are involved in the matter. Without you, we cannot make any progress and this is why we look forward to your support and your serious engagement in the process.

Powell replied:

I have just spent three hours with Sharon. He does not want to kill off the peace process and he is not playing games. But he is anxious and he has many reservations. He demands performance from you before anything else, and we are asking this of him also. He has given me a list of measures and steps he intends to implement. They include freeing a number of prisoners, opening the commercial crossings, easing the movement of workers into Israel and the passage of businessmen and merchants. Some of you will say that all this is marginal and has been seen before, but at least it is a step. Sharon knows that President Bush will expect him to make progress and to take more measures. The President will demand that Sharon meets you half way.

On the level of security, I have spoken with Abu Mazen and other security officials. It is very important for all Palestinian officials to speak out against violence and to announce its rejection with one voice, not like Arafat who used to say one thing while doing another. The culture of peace has to become part of Palestinian culture. Why do you continue to allow violence when it distances you from the achievement of the independent state you desire? As for Hamas and Jihad, perhaps it may be possible to convince them to stop the violence, but in the end they have to turn themselves into political movements. We will help by putting pressure on the Syrians to close their offices and halt their activities. President Bush will tell Sharon, 'I want to implement my vision and if you have any reservations on that, then discuss them with the Palestinians.' He wants to concentrate on the Middle East and to continue his engagement with the process. The sole obstacle is the continuation of violence and terror that have become an excuse for the lack of implementation. Dahlan has a difficult task and beginning with Gaza will be proof of your seriousness.

After that, I confirmed to Powell:

The Israelis have to help the Palestinian prime minister and so do you. The Quartet must also help because we cannot succeed in these circumstances. This requires the removal of the obstacles that are hindering the Palestinian efforts, halting the settlement activities in their entirety including natural growth and dismantling of new settlement outposts.

The Legislative Council has carried out the important job of creating the position of prime minister and confirming his powers with a vote of confidence. But the Israeli authorities are putting every obstacle in the way of the Council to prevent it from carrying out its role in a more effective way by failing to allow its members freedom of movement and barring them from travelling from Gaza. There is no reason for Israel to continue to prevent Council members from travelling, particularly since the Israeli authorities, during the special session to grant confidence to the government, agreed to grant all members permits to participate. This week, however, they prevented some members again from travelling. So they even want to control the quality of our sessions and which members are allowed to participate in them. The aim is to obstruct the work of the Council and its committees. We want the Prime Minister to succeed but if the whole world helps him, but the Israelis do not, then he will fail.

On 21 December 2004 the late Yasser Arafat's 40-day period of official mourning came to an end. Here, I would like to introduce a personal note, with some extracts from the speech I gave at his memorial service. It is my hope that this will go some way towards putting on record the emotion I felt for our late leader, for my dead friend, and for the future of our nation:

How hard it is on the spirit, how far beyond imagination, and how arduous on the heart, mind and soul, is this sad, painful moment when we stand here today, overwhelmed by the depth of our sorrow.

We, the brothers and sons of Yasser Arafat, and his companions on his path through life, are wounded and in pain. We were as accustomed to him as we were accustomed to air and water. For four decades, we lived with him every moment, night and day, and journeyed with him through every adventure, down every byway, and at every resting place. He was always among us, ever present and always brilliant, a guardian who never slept, and never became tired or weary. The warmth of his presence dominated our space and our time, and was a balm for our

souls. He was the preoccupation of the press and the television screens, the talk of capital cities and seats of government; he busied himself constantly both with the largest questions and with the smallest details. In the breadth of his knowledge, his ceaseless activity, and the depth of his compassion, it was as if he was always acting and never resting, always moving and never stopping, coming and going among us with all his vitality, intelligence and stature.

How can we, who were with him in all these places and situations, and lived through all our crises and developments secure in his unique leadership, and in the knowledge that his vigilance would never lapse nor his determination flinch no matter what came, how can we accept the reality of this calamitous absence, this frigid emptiness, this irreplaceable loss? Especially when the road before us is still long, the difficulties that await us are more severe than those before, and the need for the inspiration of his leadership is more urgent than ever before [...].

Today we miss our leader, our teacher and our inspiration. Today we look around us and we see a vacuum that we could never have imagined. Today we stand face to face with the eternal everlasting reality. Yasser Arafat is no longer with us. Abu Ammar is no longer the broad tent beneath which we took shelter, the spearhead of our leadership, the light that guides us along the path of our long journey. He has gone to face God, fulfilled and fulfilling. And, God willing, we will carry on the journey after him [...].

Abu Ammar has gone, but leaves behind him a steadfast people and a great inheritance. He has bequeathed us all our achievements, at the forefront of which we have the democratic institutions by means of which we will continue our journey without pause and have filled the leadership vacuum with an ease that has astonished all. He has gone, leaving us the principles which we will faithfully strive to follow, the dream we shall retain in the face of adversity and hard times, the hope that we will never cease to hold on to along the certain road we follow, to freedom, independence, peace, democracy and prosperity.

On this day, the 40-day memorial of Yasser Arafat, our teacher and leader, we bow to him in respect: respect for his life, his principles and positions, his policies, his wisdom and his penetrating vision. We give an undertaking to you, the Palestinian people, today, tomorrow and the day after, that our road will be the same road, our oath and promise are the same: to remain faithful to the goals of Yasser Arafat, to achieve freedom and independence, to preserve his dream of an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, to continue to hold in

our hands the burning coals that Abu Ammar held in his hands for 40 years, the fire of pain, sacrifice and redemption. Foremost must be the preservation of our national unity, and our insistence on our legitimate rights in their entirety with nothing excluded: our right to regain our people's freedom on their national ground, our right to an Arab Jerusalem, our right for our refugees to return to the land and our right to peace, security and prosperity.

This is why we repeat loudly with full belief that the path of Yasser Arafat is our path, that his principles are ours and his goals and aims are ours. And we reaffirm that our choice is the option of a just and honourable peace, for which we fought alongside Yasser Arafat. The road we travelled with our late president, as well as with all the brave martyrs and the courageous prisoners, is our only road, and we shall not deviate from it: it is the road that leads to an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Sleep soundly my brother, our leader and the symbol of Palestine. May your pure soul find its rest in heaven, fulfilled and fulfilling, with the brave and the good martyrs. We have all undertaken to continue on the road you took, and to keep your memory bright for generation after generation. We shall derive from your history of struggle that which will increase our hope, strengthen our demands, and kindle in our souls the determination to go on. Let your heart, full of faith in God, be reassured that your brothers and your companions on your long journey, together with your steadfast and resolute people, will achieve the great wishes that lived in your heart.

Historians may differ over elements of Yasser Arafat's policies and aspects of his administration, but, in my estimation, no one can disagree that he was a father for the Palestinian people and their unchallenged leader for more than 40 years. Accordingly, it cannot be denied that our late president was not just one of the great men of the Middle East, but one of the greatest world statesmen of his time. He led his people with intelligence and with a steadfastness that was not too rigid, through a bloody conflict and a treacherous environment full of traps, slippery roads, obstacles and violent upheavals. His political understanding could not be understood piecemeal and could only be grasped as a whole. He combined revolution with diplomacy, and strength with flexibility, picking his way through all the contradictions and inconsistencies which surrounded him. He never severed a link,

closed a door or lost a wager. With the acuteness of his instincts, he could read the political weather and predict the way the winds would blow. He had a unique genius. With rare unanimity on this issue, even those who disagreed with him did not challenge his leadership. He was the basis of our confidence and the inspiration for our optimism. We often differed with him, but it is easy for me to say that we were one in our love and admiration for him.

11

ABU MAZEN AS PRESIDENT

On 9 January 2005, as planned, the presidential election took place. For a number of reasons, Hamas boycotted the election. One of these was their demand that legislative elections be held at the same time to create a new Legislative Council, in which it expected to increase its power. However, Hamas declared that it would respect the outcome of the presidential poll. After Marwan al-Barghouti had pulled out as a candidate on 12 December as he had promised, there would be no split in the Fatah vote and there was no practical obstacle to the election of Abu Mazen as president. Abu Mazen, my old colleague Mahmoud Abbas, the former prime minister, as we have seen, had come out of self-imposed seclusion to resume his place on the political scene when it became clear that Yasser Arafat was fatally ill, and he had already become president of the Executive Committee of the PLO. Six other minority candidates ran, but Abu Mazen gained 62 per cent of the vote, becoming Abu Ammar's successor. In his victory speech, he said, 'I offer this victory to the soul of Yasser Arafat'. It then only remained for Abu Mazen to swear the constitutional oath as president of the Palestinian Authority.

On 15 January 2005 the Legislative Council assembled in special session for this purpose at the seat of the Palestinian government at the Muqataa in Ramallah. In the presence of the speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Rawhi Fattouh, the deputy speaker of the Council, Hasan Khurayshah, presided over the swearing of the constitutional

oath by Abu Mazen, with a quorum of 67 members of the Legislative Council present. As our new president, Abu Mazen then gave a speech in which he confirmed that he wished me to continue as prime minister and asked me 'to focus all the attention of the government on the issues of security, local, municipal and legislative elections, and reform', adding that, 'we will discuss the reform of the government according to the Basic Law'.

There was some technical discussion of whether or not I could continue as prime minister without further formal proceedings taking place. According to the Basic Law, the prime minister should offer his resignation after a new president of the Palestinian Authority is sworn in. The new president will then ask him to form a government, or not, as he chooses, and a new vote of confidence will be sought. However, Abu Mazen neither asked for my resignation, nor did he issue a presidential decree asking me to form a government. The present case seemed to differ from that envisaged by the Basic Law, since the election of the new president had followed the death of the previous incumbent, not his removal from office for political reasons, so there was no reason to suppose that the new president would wish to see the formation of a new government that might take a different direction from the previous one. The members of the Legislative Council held a lively debate on the constitutional position and the proper way to proceed. Some felt that the fact that I had not offered my resignation was a contravention of the Basic Law. One member, Rafiq al-Natcheh, a political scientist by profession who was a long-serving member of the Fatah Central Committee, argued that the Basic Law was not intended to apply to the present situation, while others contended that 'the general principle would seem to be to retain the current government with some modifications'. Other members suggested that the formation of a new government might not be necessary as long as the existing cabinet was regarded as being open to change. Any minister who had held office for a long period could be considered to be a candidate for replacement. In the event, the prevailing view was that it would be proper for there to be changes in the cabinet but that there should not necessarily be an entirely new government.

On 13 January, at a Fatah Central Committee meeting presided over by Abu Mazen, it was agreed that proposed ministerial changes

should be a matter for discussion between the President and the Prime Minister. Abdallah al-Ifranji, a senior member of the Fatah Central Committee who had previously been the PLO representative in Germany, said that it was not for the Fatah Committee to discuss the actual names of ministers. This should be left for the Prime Minister to decide, within the time limit constitutionally prescribed, and for the President to approve. When Abu Mazen returned to Ramallah, he held a press conference to confirm that 'the formation of the government will be completed within a few days and will then be put before the Legislative Council'. He added that 'while the government will include new faces, its formation will not represent the demise of the current government. But we are looking for new faces and there will be new people in a cabinet that springs from the Legislative Council'.

Meanwhile, Abu Mazen began at once to take action on vital issues related to security and our relations with Israel. On 16 January 2005, in the statement made after a meeting of the Executive Committee of the PLO at the presidential headquarters in Ramallah, the Executive Committee, with Abu Mazen in the chair, urged all the Palestinian factions to stop their armed operations and called on the Israeli government to abandon the practice of avoiding dialogue and negotiations with us, alleging that we were allowing security breaches, while continuing its own armed operations against us, with targeted assassinations, random killings, destruction and the constant expansion of settlements. Abu Mazen emphasised that we should continue our efforts to conduct a national dialogue that would lead to an effective ceasefire between Palestinian factions and produce the necessary security for the peace process to continue. On 17 January 2005 Abu Mazen called a joint meeting of the cabinet and the National Security Council at which he exhorted the Palestinian security services to spare no effort in preserving public order and strengthening the Palestinian Authority. He also reiterated the determination of the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian Authority to pursue the option of peace and the roadmap.

In the course of January, after consultations held mainly in Gaza, the Palestinian Authority reached an agreement with the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements to achieve a 'calming', or *tahdi'a*, on the ground, which would continue until the end of the year on the condition that it was reciprocated by Israel. As was explained previously, the word

tahdi'a implied a cessation of violence without a commitment to a permanent truce or ceasefire. This was an achievement we hoped to be able to use to persuade the Israeli government that they should also remember to implement their commitments towards the peace process and to halt their attacks on the Palestinian people. Despite the 'calming', however, no agreement was forthcoming from the Israelis on stopping military operations, with Ariel Sharon reiterating the threat he had already made to invade the Gaza Strip. He repeated this threat again, for example, at a meeting of the Israeli cabinet he held on 25 January in the town of Sderot, close to the Gaza Strip, in response to Palestinian attacks on Israeli targets bordering on the Gaza Strip.

Ismail Haniyyah, a leading figure in Hamas, who was later to serve as prime minister, pointed out at that time that the initiative was now with Israel. All of us were waiting and watching the behaviour of the Israelis to see whether they would offer anything tangible to the Palestinians in terms of freedom for prisoners and detainees, the return of the bodies of martyrs in their possession, and other matters. Nafiz Azzam, one of the leaders of Islamic Jihad, made it clear that from his point of view if Israel's threat to invade Gaza were to be carried out in any form then there would be no prospect at all of the 'calming' continuing. He pointed out that Israel consistently attempted to present the situation as if it were the injured party and that any action it took against the Palestinians, no matter how violent, was always in self-defence.

Returning to the constitutional issue, I met with the President on 25 January 2005 at what was now his office in Ramallah. It seemed strange to be meeting at our historic chief's old headquarters without him being there, and with a new president in charge. We talked over all the implications and modalities of the formation of my new cabinet. Afterwards, we authorised my cabinet secretary, Hasan Abu-Libdeh, to announce that consultations between the President and the Prime Minister were almost complete and that a modified cabinet list would be placed before the Legislative Council for its approval within two weeks. At the next regular meeting of the cabinet, which was held on 31 January 2005 at the offices of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza, I queried the validity of the questions that had been raised by the Legislative Council earlier in the month about the validity of forming a modified cabinet without my resignation and reappointment, and

without a new vote of confidence. Since I intended to continue with the programme for which I had already received the confidence of the Legislative Council, and had undertaken faithfully to perform the duties already assigned to me, I felt a new vote was not necessary. I also believed that I had received substantial support for this view from members of the Legislative Council. I insisted that, as I put it, 'My current government will be able to continue its work, with small modifications, until the date of the next legislative elections.'

On 29 January 2005 Abu Mazen travelled to Egypt for the first time as president, where he met Egypt's president, Hosni Mubarak, in Cairo. Afterwards, he announced that Egypt would invite the representatives of the various Palestinian factions to hold consultations in Cairo the following month. The Palestinian and Egyptian leaderships also agreed to work on four pressing issues in our relations with Israel: the release of a substantial number of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, the protection of those Palestinians who were being targeted by Israel, putting a stop to the assassinations, and the return of those who had been exiled to Gaza and Europe as a result of the Church of the Nativity crisis in Bethlehem in 2002. Egypt also undertook to continue to support us in our efforts to oblige Israel to fulfil its commitments and resume the peace process.

In early February, the new American secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, made a rapid visit to the region. Having seen Ariel Sharon, she came to Ramallah on 7 February to talk to Abu Mazen. She brought us several demands from the Israeli government, one of which was not to do anything to hinder the implementation of the Gaza disengagement plan. She also hinted that the Americans objected to our polling Palestinian public opinion on anything to do with the disengagement. As she put it, 'it is important that there should not be any obstacles; the timetable announced by Sharon must be fulfilled.' She added, 'I know that you have internal problems, but it is not acceptable to postpone the implementation of the plan.'

Condoleezza Rice's visit marked the resumption of American intervention. She made it clear that the American administration was very keen to exploit the opportunity for progress that they believed was presented by Abu Mazen's election as president. She also repeated to us the determination of the United States to see the disengagement

plan implemented. She emphasised the importance of adhering to the timetable laid down for the withdrawal and called for it not to be delayed, stressing that the disengagement plan was in Washington's eyes not just an internal matter for Israel, but part of the peace process. The American administration was also ready to give Sharon its support and therefore not to pressure him on other matters. At the same time, Rice expressed reservations over the Israeli interpretation of the letter of guarantee that President Bush had given to Sharon around a year before. She said President Bush had not promised Sharon that the large settlements would not be evacuated at a future date. In her opinion, the subject of the settlement blocs was open to negotiation.

While she was with us, she also announced the appointment of a new American security envoy, General William 'Kip' Ward. General Ward's brief was to oversee the development of the security relationship between Israel and the Palestinians and to aid the Palestinians in bringing the multiplicity of Palestinian security services under one control. His brief would be limited to security matters. Condoleezza Rice revealed as well that both Sharon and President Abbas had accepted invitations to visit Washington in the spring. She also gave details of the immediate release of US \$40 million to be paid to us over the coming 90 days for what she called a quick-action programme to create jobs for Palestinians and rebuild the Palestinian infrastructure.

On 8 February 2005 the Legislative Council issued a ruling that as prime minister I must declare the formation of my new cabinet within ten days and submit it to the Legislative Council to secure a vote of confidence according to the Basic Law. The Legislative Council had conceded that I should have more time, but a group of its members were anxious to know who would be in the new cabinet. They also wished to put an end to the controversy about the supposed procedural irregularity.

Meanwhile, the situation in Gaza remained turbulent. Egypt continued its attempts to mediate between the Palestinian Authority and the Islamic groups, and Palestinian factional leaders accepted a number of invitations to Cairo to talk matters over with Egyptian officials. On 8 February 2005, a summit meeting was held under the auspices of the Egyptian government in Sharm el-Sheikh that aroused hostile reactions from the Islamic factions and virtually halted what

progress had been made. At the summit, Abu Mazen and Ariel Sharon met as the guests of Egypt's President Mubarak, with the participation of King Abdullah II of Jordan. After the summit, statements were made by both Ariel Sharon and Abu Mazen, but the two principal Islamic resistance movements, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, found them to be unsatisfactory. Sharon simply demanded a cessation of violence and Abu Mazen could not impose conditions on the Israelis. On 9 February Hamas spokesmen commented that what had been agreed at the meeting did not reflect the position of any of the Palestinian factions except that of the Palestinian Authority. Hamas would not agree to a truce without a commitment by Israel to fulfil commitments that it had already made, including the release of prisoners. Nafiz Azzam, a leading member of Islamic Jihad, said his movement would wait until issues that had not been discussed at Sharm el-Sheikh were clarified and until Israel committed itself to acceptable conditions before any truce was declared. On 10 February 2005 Israeli targets close to Gaza were hit by rockets in what had become routine violence, allegedly in response to Israeli violations.

On 11 February Abu Mazen, hoping to rescue the situation, came to Gaza to brief the Palestinian factions on the results of the summit in Sharm el-Sheikh. In the coming days, the Palestinian Authority in fact succeeded in reaching an agreement with Hamas and Islamic Jihad which committed them to maintaining the 'calming' to which they had consented before the Sharm el-Sheikh summit had been held. There was also a discussion of the right to self-defence. Mahmoud al-Zahar, one of the leaders of Hamas, said that in the event of an Israeli violation they would discuss with the Palestinian Authority what an appropriate and measured response might be. For Islamic Jihad, Nafiz Azzam also confirmed his movement would continue the 'calming' that had been announced over two weeks before, but that it would not declare a truce or a ceasefire before the movement's leadership had fully considered what had been said at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit and after it.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian security delegation in Gaza, headed by Major General Mustafa al-Buhayri, which had been invited by the Palestinian Authority to work on an advisory basis with the Palestinian Authority's security services, continued its efforts to carry out its brief to achieve the necessary conditions for calm. On 12 February the

Egyptians travelled from Gaza to Ramallah for consultations and on 14 February I met them at the Muqataa. I was able to brief them on the meetings I had held with the leaders of the Islamic factions in Gaza and what had transpired at those meetings. I reviewed with them the plan the Egyptians had put forward for future action and ways in which the Palestinian security services could be supported. We agreed to continue our cooperation with the aim of rebuilding and reorganising the Palestinian security services in such a way that would strengthen the determination of the Palestinian Authority to respond to future security requirements.

On 16 February Hamas and Islamic Jihad made a welcome statement that they would continue the 'calming' to which they had made commitments both to Abu Mazen and to the Egyptian security delegation, despite continuing Israeli actions, in the latest of which four Palestinians had been killed. A Hamas spokesman said that Hamas and Islamic Jihad believed that though Israel's violations continued, the maintenance of the 'calming' would be consonant with the principle of national unity and they had held a bilateral meeting in which they had both decided to adhere to their previous commitments. Later, on 27 February, the most prominent of the secular Palestinian resistance factions, including the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, also declared their commitment to the maintenance of the 'calming'.

Unfortunately, we found ourselves in disagreement with Israel over the implementation of their planned unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Israel consistently failed to give us the necessary basic information on how the operation was to be carried out that would help us to prepare for the post-withdrawal period. On 15 February 2005 Ariel Sharon had raised the issue of the coordination of the disengagement with the Palestinian authorities. In a statement, he said: 'I would have liked to cooperate over the withdrawal from Gaza. It is of great importance that the area we leave does not fall into the hands of Hamas and Jihad but those of the Palestinian Authority. We also wish the withdrawal to be accomplished in an atmosphere of calm.' Israeli and Palestinian agencies began to discuss the coordination of the plan. Despite a previous Israeli government statement that the houses belonging to settlers would be demolished, Sharon announced that the Israeli army had been instructed to hand such buildings over

intact. Shimon Peres, Israel's deputy prime minister since Labour had re-entered the Israeli government in January 2005, informed the Palestinian Authority that Israel wanted an agreement under which the buildings would not be destroyed. He also proposed that the Palestinians should receive the existing agricultural buildings, including greenhouses, in a state that would allow them to continue to be used as a going concern. Peres made this suggestion at a meeting he held with Palestinian officials in Tel Aviv, as well as saying that Israel would release the houses of the settlers undamaged, so that the Palestinian authorities could either demolish the buildings or not as they chose.

On our side, our eventual decision was not to consult with the Israelis over their withdrawal. We had asked for guarantees regarding the post-withdrawal situation, which would include the details of further areas to be evacuated by Israel and an undertaking to resume the negotiations on the final settlement. As this undertaking was not forthcoming, we decided to remain completely detached from the disengagement process, except for security issues. When Muhammad Dahlan, the Palestinian minister in charge of disengagement, met the American envoys, Elliott Abrams and David Welch, he said, 'There is no coordination on disengagement and there is nothing to discuss.' His intention, as decided by us, was to allow Israel to implement, and to be seen implement, their disengagement plan unilaterally.

On 16 February 2005, at the end of a regular meeting of the Fatah Central Committee, I said I would submit my new cabinet to the Legislative Council and ask for a vote of confidence on 22 February. I refused at that stage to reveal more about who would be in the cabinet. On 17 February the Legislative Council agreed that the submission and the vote should be on 22 February. On 21 February a meeting of the Fatah Central Committee was convened to discuss my nominations. The next day, the Legislative Council went into session at noon for its debate on my new cabinet. Out of 24 ministers, 17 were newly appointed, most of whom could be described as technocrats.

In my speech, I assured the Council that my new government would implement its programme within the coming hundred days. I committed myself to the reform of ministries and of non-ministerial organisations that were under the control of the government, and also to reforms in the judicial apparatus and in the government's relationship

with the media. There were some 45 non-governmental bodies attached to ministries, many of which I merged. A national agency to supervise the retirement of salaried officials was to be created and a college to provide administrative training for public sector officials was re-established. We planned to carry out much governmental activity online in future and a body was set up to aid ministries to move towards electronic government. We prepared a development plan for 2005–2007, covering food security and planning for the interests of less wealthy citizens.

I also took steps to strengthen the office of prime minister and make sure that it was more responsible. The prime minister's office was allocated more staff to enable it to monitor the activities of the individual ministries and to ensure the implementation of agreed policy across government. In accordance with the amended Basic Law's provisions relating to the financial responsibilities of members of the government and the administration, I announced that the prime minister and the cabinet should make public declarations of their financial situations and private financial resources, as well as those of their spouses and children, with details of land, real estate, movable property, bank accounts, equities, bonds and cash balances, held both within Palestine and outside. I also established a body to supervise civil service appointments and promotions, with the intention of stopping what had been seen as a decline in the administrative competence of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority. I took steps to reform and organise the Palestinian diplomatic corps, putting it on a more formal footing in conformity with the rest of the civil service. There was a certain amount of debate but by 24 February my list was accepted, with a vote of 55 in favour, ten against and four abstentions. In the evening of 24 February, the members of the new cabinet took the constitutional oath before the President.

Meanwhile, on 22 February 2005 President Bush, during a visit to Europe, took the opportunity in a speech he made in Brussels to reiterate a number of principles for a solution in the Middle East that were already part of the roadmap. He asked for administrative reform by the Palestinian Authority, on which I had already embarked. But he also mentioned elements that were extremely welcome to us and regarded subjects on which we had constantly asked for reassurance.

These included a demand for Israel to freeze settlement activity entirely, and the principle that the peace process should lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank with contiguous and viable territory. As he put it, 'A state scattered territory will not work.' After the start of President Bush's second term, he had on a number of occasions indicated that he was once more disposed to dedicate time and effort to bringing about a peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis and that 2005 would witness the launch of a renewed peace process. However, we had begun to fear that his enthusiasm for the withdrawal from Gaza was leading him to forget promises that had been made to us.

This evident desire of the United States to reactivate the peace process and return to the roadmap was met by an equally strong insistence by Israel on the priority it gave to its disengagement plan in Gaza. The Israeli government appeared to be aware of the extent to which the Americans were committed to the roadmap. However, the Israeli government was also able, by intensely lobbying the American administration, to persuade it to accept that Israel's disengagement plan could be seen as a stage on the way back to political negotiations and therefore not contradictory to the roadmap. Sharon's idea of what he called a 'long-term interim solution', which we feared would lead to discussion of final status issues, began to find a degree of acceptance in the American administration, which apparently conceded that it was not in complete contradiction to the roadmap. This enabled Sharon to claim that Israel was implementing the roadmap, though with no commitment to the dates and phases of the plan. This was what Sharon wanted. His insistence was that the implementation of the roadmap was a matter of performance and not of dates. This was not surprising, as dates were anathema to Sharon. His aim was to insist that the roadmap was being implemented but to proceed with a glacial slowness indistinguishable from no progress at all.

In practice, however, as events unrolled, not everything appeared to go Israel's way, in particular with Abu Mazen in charge rather than the late President Arafat. The American position seemed to be somewhat different from that of the Israelis and Abu Mazen showed skill in driving a wedge between them. Sharon's goal of using the Gaza disengagement to distract the American administration from the roadmap had had some success at first, as we have seen. However,

following the demise of President Arafat, President Bush immediately sent warm congratulations to Abu Mazen and invited him to visit the White House. American statements began to tend more towards the suggestion that there should be a return to the political process and towards the implementation of the roadmap.

On 1 March 2005 the Quartet held an international meeting on the sidelines of the London conference convened to support the Palestinian Authority, which was attended by 23 states and six international institutions. The Quartet stipulated that the disengagement plan should be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the roadmap and appeared finally to give its blessing to the disengagement plan. According to the Quartet's statement, it commends the Israeli cabinet's recent approval of the initiative to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, and reiterates that withdrawal from Gaza should be full and complete and should be undertaken in a manner consistent with the roadmap, as an important step toward the realisation of the vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security'. The implication was that withdrawal from Gaza could not be used by Israel as a pretext for taking no further steps towards a negotiated peace.

These were all indications that the roadmap was becoming inescapable as a paradigm for negotiations. On the other hand, it was clear that the Israelis would continue to place obstacles when they could. This would be reflected in the relative priorities they assigned to elements of the roadmap and in their attitude to the timetable for its implementation. A halt to 'violence' on the Palestinian side and the reorganisation of the Palestinian security forces would continue to be an Israeli priority. Meanwhile, Israel would always drag its feet on the demand that it dismantle settlement outposts and freeze settlement activity, and withdraw to the borders of 28 September 2001.

On 8 March 2005 we were gratified when President Bush again called on Israel to halt all settlement activity in order not to exclude the possibility of a viable Palestinian state. However, the issue most indicative of Israel's unwillingness to implement its commitments remained its insistence on carrying on with the construction of the separation wall despite the international opposition to it, the ruling of the International Court of Justice regarding its legality and its conflict

with both the letter and the spirit of the roadmap. The international community was aware of the nature of Israel's settlement activities, and poured all the money it could raise into it, grasping fully how much it endangered the possibility of a return to real political dialogue in the region. It became ever clearer to us, however, that Sharon's government had no intention of implementing the roadmap as the international community wanted unless Israel was exposed to serious pressure from the United States and the world at large.

An important step for us in March 2005 was the resumption of the Cairo dialogue of 15–17 March between the Palestinian Authority and the various Palestinian factions, including the radical Palestinian movements and the Islamic groups. As prime minister, I played a leading role in these talks. National dialogue and factional reconciliation had always been issues to which I was strongly committed. Only by achieving some degree of consensus, through a process of national dialogue, could President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority hope to make real progress in reopening negotiations with Israel. On 11 March, ahead of the Cairo dialogue, Israel for the first time allowed a number of leading figures representing Fatah, the PFLP and the DFLP in Gaza to cross from the Gaza Strip into Egypt. Israel had imposed restrictions on the movements of such Palestinian figures outside the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000. Among others, Jamil al-Majdalawi, a leading member of the PFLP in the Gaza Strip, and Saleh Zaidan, a member of the central committee of the DFLP, were allowed to travel. Israel refused, however, to allow the representatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to take part in the dialogue, so that the participation of these two movements was, as before, restricted to those based outside Gaza. Khaled Mishal, the president of the Hamas political bureau, came to Cairo from Damascus, as did the secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad movement, Ramadan Shalah. They were joined by Ahmad Jibreel, the secretary-general of the PFLP General Command, and Nayef Hawatmeh, the secretary-general of the DFLP. In addition to the participation of 12 Palestinian factions, it was also attended, for the first time, by a Syrian official, Waleed al-Muallem, a deputy foreign minister.

On 15 March, Abu Mazen arrived from Ramallah and the talks began. Abu Mazen reiterated his support for the 'calming' to which all

the Palestinian factions had committed themselves in the interests of the peace process. However, he also said that the Palestinian Authority was not happy to accept that commitments under the roadmap should be fulfilled by one side only. Nevertheless, the Palestinian president told the leaders of 12 factions sitting around the table that the decrease in armed attacks had led to a reduction in the suffering of the Palestinian population, as there had been fewer of the gratuitous attacks that Israel justified in the name of retaliation. He added that the 'calming' had borne positive and tangible fruit in the interests of the citizens of Palestine and their cause.

President Abbas praised Egypt's initiative in hosting our national dialogue and expressed his gratitude for its support for our cause. 'We also confirm,' he went on, 'that it is necessary to re-energise the political pathway and to move ahead with the implementation of agreements. We must also move on swiftly to final status negotiations in order to reach a settlement to end the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Territories that has prevailed since 1967.' He also drew attention to the Arab Peace Initiative in Beirut in 2000, which had proposed the normalisation of relations between the Arab countries and Israel in exchange for an Israeli return of all Arab territories occupied after the 1967 war.

The head of the Egyptian secret service, Major General Omar Sulayman, called for an agreement to strengthen the current 'calming,' which he said lay at the heart of the prospects for a resumption of the peace negotiations with Israel. The assembled factional leaders, however, made their position clear when they said that they did not regard the prospect of moving on from the 'calming' to a ceasefire as an important goal, unless Abu Mazen was able to convince Israel to satisfy their demands. These included the release of prisoners, a halt to Israeli military incursions into Palestinian cities and an end to the targeted assassination of activists. On the positive side, the Palestinian factions reiterated their commitment for that moment to the 'calming' already in effect. They also agreed on the need to put pressure on Israel to meet the obligations and commitments to which it had already agreed. The factional leaders declared that they recognised the need to keep in mind the Palestinian national cause as something distinct from sectional and other objectives.

On 17 March 2005, at the end of the three days of talks in Cairo, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian factions agreed to remain committed to the 'calming' that was due to continue to the end of 2005, on condition that Israel stop its attacks on the Palestinians. A final statement was issued and it became known as the Cairo Declaration. The text of this document is in Appendix 1. It formalised the call for a commitment to continuing the current 'calming' in return for a reciprocal Israeli commitment to halt all forms of attack on our land and people wherever they might be. The participants also demanded all prisoners and those arrested be released, and emphasised that the continuing process of settlement building by Israel, the construction of the separation wall and the 'Judaisation' of East Jerusalem were explosive factors. The participants agreed unanimously that dialogue was the only way for the Palestinian factions to achieve national unity, as well as unity within the Palestinian ranks. They undertook to not resort to arms to settle internal differences in the future. Crucially, the Cairo Declaration called for new elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council to be held in accordance with a reform in the electoral system to introduce a combination of proportional representation under a list system and direct election by constituencies. This was important and led to the change in the Palestinian constitution that we later introduced.

As prime minister and the head of the delegation to the national dialogue in Cairo, I made a speech at the end of the conference:

At the end of these important talks, which with our national will as Palestinians to unite, and from our profound mutual awareness of the unique juncture at which we stand, and the gravity of its challenges [...] we have all taken a decision to achieve our goal of unity through dialogue and openness, and through the exchange of ideas and opinions, with complete dedication and responsibility. It pleases me to mark the close of this important phase of our Palestinian national dialogue and to congratulate our people on this achievement.

The Palestinian Authority went on to pass legislation regulating the position of the executive authority and established the principle of the separation of powers. It reorganised some of the Palestinian security forces, deploying Palestinian forces along the borders between the Gaza Strip and Israel. All these steps were accepted and approved

by the international community as falling within the framework of administrative, legal and economic reforms required from the Palestinian Authority by the roadmap.

On 30 March 2005 I went once more to talk to the Israeli deputy prime minister, Shimon Peres, and Haim Ramon, a minister without portfolio in the Israeli cabinet. Peres also had with him a group of his advisors, including Avi Gil, Yoram Dori and Yitzhak Gorvitz. I was accompanied by Muhammad Dahlan and Saeb Eraykat and the head of my office, Salah Elayan. We discussed various issues concerning the issue of withdrawal from Gaza. The aim of the Israelis was to attempt to persuade us to participate in organising the disengagement, which as I have explained we had decided to leave to them to carry out on their own in order not to be held in any way responsible for it.

Shimon Peres began by saying,

We hope that the withdrawal process from the Gaza Strip is completed successfully. We have never thought that the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip would be the end; in fact it is the beginning and we have to work on that. We have to agree to a beginning and on how to continue. The atmosphere that will be created will affect the developments on the ground, even including the American position. The problem is that the time is very short because the withdrawal will begin at the end of July [...]. We are not here to give you orders: we are here to discuss matters with you and to inform you of what we can do.

For my part, I confirmed first of all that there was no conflict on these issues between Abu Mazen and me. I explained that we had always worked together, at Oslo and afterwards, and that we would continue to do so. I was not, as had been reported, putting obstacles in Abu Mazen's way. I addressed Peres as follows:

We are happy to see Israel withdrawing from our land, from the Gaza Strip as well as from the West Bank, even if it is limited to the evacuation of four settlements in the north of the West Bank. We regard this as a positive move if it comes within the framework of the peace process in general and not as a unilateral initiative, paving the way for other unilateral actions that may be more dangerous. We have begun our preparations for the aftermath of the withdrawal so that we can assume full responsibility for the areas from which you withdraw, in security, economic and social terms.

I also sought to make the conversation more broad so that it would cover the other issues that concerned me, not wishing to see our conversation limited solely to the Gaza disengagement plan:

We have never said that we did not want to cooperate with this plan. But I want to know where we are going from here. In particular, I want to know what will happen to settlement expansion. We cannot just speak of Gaza and forget about what is happening in Jerusalem and around it. We cannot accept 2,000 housing units being evacuated in the Gaza Strip only to see them replaced by 3,500 units being built in Maale Adumim and 3,000 others in the rest of the settlements in the West Bank. We want to know where we are with the roadmap; where do you place the disengagement plan in relation to that? Is it in the first phase, the second or the third phase of the roadmap? If it is supposed to be the third phase, then we do not want it. Sharon has proposed his plan to bypass the roadmap and to serve as a substitute for it; and as you know, he likes bypass roads!

Turning once more to the question of the separation wall, I told Peres I would never accept that it was being built solely for security purposes, as was claimed:

For when one Palestinian is separated from another, when streets are divided in half, and Palestinian land is stolen, then this is a matter of unilaterally demarcating borders without consultation. We want to cooperate and coordinate, we want to talk, we want to negotiate and we want to set up joint projects. Our aims are more ambitious than are sometimes said. We want to live together in dignity and respect, in an atmosphere of tolerance, coexistence, equality and respect for all our legitimate national rights.

Peres replied:

We are committed to the roadmap and the disengagement plan is the step before it, a prelude to the roadmap. Sharon has said the implementation of the roadmap depends on what you do in terms of security. If you carry out your commitments under phase one of the roadmap by dismantling the infrastructure of the Tanzim, then this would be a condition for implementing the rest of the clauses of the roadmap. As for illegal settlements and our position on them, yes, we will remove them, but the question is when? We cannot carry out all that we want, we will not overwhelm the government with our tasks, we need to build a coalition

for that, otherwise the wind will blow it in our faces. We do not deny that the roadmap calls for the dismantling of illegal settlements, and as for Maale Adumim, this is only planning, it is not to be built. We will place only a police station there, and we will fulfil our promises. As for unilateral withdrawal, the Egyptians, the Arab states, America, Europe and the whole world have accepted that it should take place; so what can we expect Sharon to do? Should he be more Arab than the Arabs?

I replied:

There is no conflict between us on the withdrawal, but we are against unilateral measures. I want to agree. Sharon has promoted his plan very astutely, but that does not necessarily mean that I object to it. However, if withdrawal begins at the end of July, that means that we will have four difficult months. This is why things have to be very clear or you might lose us as a partner if things carry on as they are [...]. I do not ask that you move immediately to the final status negotiations, but I am asking for things that would help us, because if you continue with your policy of settlement and settlement expansion and talk about the annexation of settlement blocs, then none of us can accept this. We are about to hold local elections in 86 locations in May 2005 and legislative elections in July 2005. If we lose these, then the situation will become very difficult.

12

TURMOIL IN GAZA

On 14 April 2005, as the starting date for the disengagement in Gaza approached, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced the appointment of an envoy to represent the Quartet Principals who would work closely with the two sides. This was James Wolfensohn, the former president of the World Bank. His role was to be concerned with non-military aspects of the withdrawal, including what should be done with the assets that would be left behind by the Israelis. Condoleezza Rice said both sides had shown evidence of good will but that serious problems remained to be resolved. James Wolfensohn commented, 'I think there is no more important mission currently than working with the Israelis and the Palestinians to bring about an equitable and a just and a secure solution to the issues that they are facing.'

Faced with the potential Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the Egyptian government also felt obliged to become involved. Egypt's interest was to assist the Palestinians, but also to avoid instability along its borders. On 17 April 2005, Egypt's President Mubarak invited Abu Mazen and a delegation representing Ariel Sharon to Sharm el-Sheikh. Abu Mazen told Mubarak that the Palestinian Authority was prepared to cooperate with Israel on the withdrawal from Gaza but that it still needed to know more about their plans. 'We have to know where we stand,' he said, 'and whether this is connected to the roadmap or not. Is this to be a total withdrawal or not?' Dov Weisglass, the director of Sharon's office, said: 'The moment that the Palestinian Authority

declares its intention to cooperate with us, then negotiating channels will be activated.'

By then, though we had held back from active cooperation with the Israelis, the Palestinian Authority had already embarked on a wide-ranging planning process in preparation for the aftermath of the disengagement. Two 'technical committees' were at work, and they comprised experts in various relevant fields, one on the ground in Gaza and the other within the presidential administration in Ramallah. They had already made various recommendations, one of which was that Israel take responsibility for the demolition of all the buildings in the evacuated settlements which the Palestinian Authority did not require. The houses of the Israeli settlers were unsuitable for Palestinian use. They also recommended that the Palestinian Authority insist that it take possession of all property that was allowed to remain in the evacuated settlements, and that Israel negotiate over real estate and buildings only with the Palestinian Authority. The two committees included specialists in fields such as international law, urban planning, land management and agriculture. Muhammad Dahlan was appointed as the political coordinator of the committees and we delegated negotiations with Israel to him.

It appeared that Israel had not so far decided to what extent it wanted cooperation with the Palestinian Authority over the disengagement plan. The areas in which coordination was desirable were the establishment of security arrangements to prevent what the Israelis referred to as terrorist attacks while the settlers were leaving, and the transfer of the property left behind to the Palestinian Authority. In the meantime, Muhammad Dahlan confirmed to the Israelis that we wanted them to demolish the settlements before they withdrew so that we could proceed immediately with our own arrangements. In a statement relating to the consequences of the withdrawal, he said,

The Palestinian Authority has established a number of principles. First, we do not intend to allow the Israelis to present this withdrawal as ending the occupation of our territory. Next, we must endeavour to ensure that there is a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank so that they are connected geographically. Finally, the withdrawal should include the entry points and crossings, including the proposed seaport and airport.

Though Muhammad Dahlan insistently raised these points and others with Israeli officials in his meetings with them, he received no answers to them.

On 11 April 2005 Ariel Sharon visited the United States, where he held talks with officials in Washington and was also given the privilege of an invitation to President Bush's ranch in Texas. At a joint press conference, President Bush praised the disengagement plan and urged the Palestinians to back it as well. He reiterated the intention of the United States to help the Palestinians to establish an independent state of which Gaza would be part. But he alarmed us when he said once again that it was unrealistic for the Palestinians to expect a complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and return to the pre-1967 borders. At the same press conference, Sharon said he would respond to American demands to remove settlement outposts but he insisted on the need for the large settlements in the West Bank to be annexed to Israel in any final peace agreement.

Though Sharon had secured Bush's agreement on the disengagement plan, some difference between their positions became apparent in a formal exchange of letters between the two. Sharon drew attention to the apparent concession made to Israel in the letter he had received from the President, when it indicated that Israel's major settlements could remain under Israeli sovereignty. Sharon took this as a green light from the United States to expand these settlements further. On the other hand, the Americans insisted on the roadmap and on eventual progress towards an independent Palestinian state as an overriding objective, going on to say that the withdrawal from Gaza presented a real opportunity, which it was important to seize to make progress with the roadmap and ultimately to realise President Bush's vision of two states existing side by side.

On 20 April a number of American officials came to Ramallah to discuss coordination between the two sides over the disengagement. Assistant Secretary of State David Welch and Elliott Abrams, the assistant to President Bush's national security adviser, were accompanied by the recently appointed security coordinator, General William Ward, and the American consul general in Jerusalem, David Pearce. They brought a letter from the American administration to the Palestinian Authority which offered reassurance that Gaza would not

be the last area from which the Israelis would withdraw, but repeated the American view that the Gaza disengagement needed to succeed so that other stages from the roadmap could follow. I was at the meeting the Americans held with Muhammad Dahlan's committee in charge of the operation to prepare for the withdrawal from Gaza, and they appeared anxious to be reassured over security. Muhammad Dahlan took the opportunity to ask the American envoys to seek Washington's backing for the major economic projects that were required to reinvigorate the Palestinian economy, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

We had no reservations in confirming that we would be prepared to cooperate with the disengagement from Gaza, as long as it was seen as an element within the roadmap and not an alternative to it. We made the point that there would need to be third-party monitoring of the international crossing point to Egypt, regional airspace and territorial waters in the aftermath of the withdrawal. The need for a corridor between the West Bank and Gaza was especially important. I personally emphasised our insistence on preserving the legal status of the Gaza Strip as an integral part of the Palestinian territories and as a part of a Palestinian entity which also included the West Bank. Abrams and Welch went on from their meeting with us to see Sharon, his foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, and the Israeli defence minister, Shaul Mofaz. They apparently conveyed an optimistic impression of their talks in Ramallah and reported to the Israelis that they had found the Palestinians ready to cooperate over the disengagement.

On 21 April Saeb Eraykat and I met Shimon Peres. Peres stressed that the Gaza disengagement was, as he saw it, the 'pre-roadmap'. He added that if, once the disengagement was completed, we could handle security issues satisfactorily, Sharon would be willing to continue to negotiate. He promised substantial help for the Palestinian economy, including aid from Europe. I emphasised to him that one of the priorities of the Palestinians was to develop the industrial zones, and our first concerns were the airport, the seaport, and the construction of electricity generation plants. We wanted a high-tech economy. Peres and I agreed to set up meetings between the expert teams on our side and theirs. We asked for cooperation in the aftermath of the disengagement

to begin with talks regarding the transfer to us of the Erez industrial area, after which there would be a discussion about the transfer of the agricultural greenhouses from the settlements in the Gaza Strip. Peres satisfied our concerns by promising that 'Gaza first would not be Gaza last', and reiterated Israel's commitment to the roadmap.

For our part, we agreed to cooperate to ensure that the withdrawal plan was successfully executed in the appropriate atmosphere of security and we provisionally undertook to continue to implement our commitments under the roadmap, if Israel fulfilled its obligations to our satisfaction. We therefore continued with our administrative preparations and with contingency plans for all eventualities. We discussed our proposals with James Wolfensohn, the former World Bank president and special envoy for the Quartet, when he came to see us. On the security front, we also took practical steps to maintain the 'calming', showing our continued readiness to cooperate fully with the Israeli side in security matters, under the supervision and monitoring of the American envoy, General Ward.

Various international efforts were being made to improve the outcome of the withdrawal and its aftermath for the Palestinians; however, most of these efforts of course came to nothing in the end. In April 2005 the Rand Corporation, based in the United States, produced two major reports, covering many aspects of post-withdrawal Palestine, including many original ideas. One suggestion from the Rand Corporation was to build a high-speed rail link between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to allow movement between the two areas, and the rail link would also connect with Gaza airport. This suggestion was actually conveyed to us by the Israeli minister Haim Ramon, an associate of Shimon Peres, who was directing the communications concerning the civil and economic coordination of the disengagement on the Israeli side. We saw disadvantages in this, pointing out that we wanted the restoration of the so-called 'safe passage' between Gaza and the West Bank that had been briefly opened in 1999. But, in any case, the plan was typical of a mood in which an entirely unrealistic future for Gaza was being imagined.

In the same atmosphere of anticipation, the budgetary committees of the two houses of the American Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate, met on 30 April to discuss ways in which the financial

aid promised by President Bush for the Palestinian people could be delivered. On our behalf, President Bush asked the Saudi crown prince, Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz, for financial aid to rebuild the Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal. American officials said that Bush was committed to making the withdrawal plan succeed in order to win European and Arab support for his government's effort in what they called the 'democratisation of the Middle East'. On 2 May 2005 the American senator, Joseph Lieberman, came to visit me in my office in Ramallah. He said that he appreciated the Palestinian Authority's efforts to ensure the success of the disengagement plan, and he reassured me that Washington understood the need for financial support. I showed him documents detailing our level of preparation and our arrangements for the immediate post-withdrawal phase, and explained the assistance we would need. A gathering of the World Economic Forum was held on 21 May at a Dead Sea resort in Jordan and I seized the opportunity to talk about the impending withdrawal face-to-face with Shimon Peres, with whom I was in constant touch over the details of the process.

At the end of May, Abu Mazen paid his first visit to the White House as the Palestinian president. I was with him as he flew to the United States. Others in the Palestinian party were Nasser al-Qudwa, Salam Fayyad, Hasan Abdul Rahman, who was the Palestine representative in Washington, and Nabil Abu Rudayna. On 26 May, during the joint press conference after the talks, President Bush emphasised that in his view the withdrawal from Gaza laid the foundations for the implementation of the roadmap which he declared was the only way to achieve the vision of two states existing side by side that he had enunciated. He announced that the United States would give the Palestinian Authority immediate aid to the amount of \$50 million for new housing and infrastructure projects, adding that the money was intended to be used to improve the standard of living of the Palestinians in Gaza, where levels of poverty and unemployment were very high.

President Bush also said he would send the secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, to Jerusalem and Ramallah before the beginning of the Israeli withdrawal, explaining that she would consult with the Palestinians and the Israelis over the fulfilment of mutual commitments and the resumption of the roadmap. In reply to the American President, Abu Mazen underlined the readiness of

the Palestinian Authority to cooperate with Israel to facilitate the handover in the Gaza Strip and the limited area to be evacuated in the northern West Bank, but repeated that we saw the disengagement as part of the process of ending the Israeli occupation, which, it had to be clear, was still in effect in the West Bank. On balance, we felt that the outcome of the visit was positive.

On 6 June 2005 we held a conference in Jericho, in which many Palestinian civil society organisations participated, to discuss how to proceed after the disengagement plan had been put into effect and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza had been carried out. In my address, I outlined the Palestinian government's vision of how the unilateral disengagement plan could work. I said it added a further paradox to the paradoxes that had characterised the history of our protracted conflict. The doctrine from which Israelis had started, that Palestine was 'a land with no people', had been transformed by Golda Meir into the assertion that the Palestinian people did not exist, and most recently Sharon's Israel had decided that there was 'no Palestinian partner for peace.' Despite the prevalence of these claims at various historical periods, our presence today in our historic land had become an incontrovertible demonstration that such false claims had to be abandoned, and it constituted living proof that reality always reveals the truth.

In another development on 6 June, talks between us and the Israelis about cooperation reached deadlock. On 7 June Muhammad Dahlan remarked that it was Israel that was failing to cooperate with the Palestinians over the withdrawal. Speaking to James Wolfensohn, he said that 'there has been no cooperation, only talk of cooperation.' Noting that Israel was complaining via the American envoy about the lack of coordination, he remarked that when the Palestinians had expressed their willingness to cooperate, it was Israel that had 'backtracked'. As June went on, other difficulties began to emerge. There was increasing factional chaos, both in Gaza and the West Bank. On 15 June I made the following statement:

If no end is put to the security violations which are taking place, this government will not be able to carry out its responsibilities. We cannot tell our people that we are responsible when fire is opened on citizens and their property is attacked. These violations have sometimes reached the extent of murder.

I considered the prevalent lawlessness to have resulted from the inability of the leadership to take decisions, and I did not exempt myself from blame for failing, to a certain extent, to ensure that the security forces did their job. If the government was to be able to function, the security services must be effective. My view was that those who broke the law must be arrested and punished, as I said in the same statement:

We also inform the security services that we will not allow any violations whatsoever and that every official must shoulder his individual responsibility. Any official who fails to hold those responsible for misdemeanours accountable for their actions must step down. Also, anyone who rebels against authority must step down. We cannot remain silent.

Perhaps as a result of this, I personally faced violent criticism from armed factions, including those claiming to be connected to Fatah. This led me to conclude that anarchy had reached the point where senior Palestinian Authority officials were under threat from gangs and orderly government was at risk. As a movement, we in Fatah withdrew our support from those we identified to be claiming allegiance to Fatah but who refused to agree to refrain from violence.

While all these developments were taking place, we had not lost sight of our commitment to reform, and foremost in this was our own internal determination to improve our system of governance. On 18 June 2005, in accordance with the undertakings we had made in March in the Cairo Declaration, the Legislative Council passed amendments to the Basic Law that would take effect with the next elections. The number of members of the Palestinian Legislative Council was increased from 88 to 132, and a system of voting was adopted under which half of the Council's membership was elected by proportional representation within the electorate as a whole, with voting for lists rather than individuals, while the other half was elected by simple majority voting for individuals standing within constituencies. The Council also instituted a quota system to ensure the election of women. The overall effect was to improve participation by all the various factions and elements within Palestinian society. At the same time, however, we were obliged to delay the Legislative Council elections that had been scheduled for 17 July in order to allow the new division of the country into constituencies to take place. This, incidentally, it

must be admitted, suited those Fatah supporters who were worried that an early election would be won by Hamas.

On 29 June, amid mounting disorder due to the imminence of the withdrawal, I decided to place the government and Palestinian institutions on an emergency footing until the Israeli withdrawal was completed. All ministers concerned with any aspect of the withdrawal would be personally present in Gaza for at least three days a week, and for one day a week in Jenin. I also floated the idea that a national unity government could be formed, if the factional leaders were interested. Hamas rejected this suggestion, saying that they had heard the suggestion in the media but they had not been contacted. On the other hand, the DFLP showed some interest.

As the implementation of the Israeli pullout from Gaza grew closer, we were conscious that opposition to the withdrawal was becoming stronger in Israel, in particular from settlers and the Israeli extremist right-wing parties, though there was concern across the political spectrum. The Israeli general public also had growing doubts, because the disengagement and the motivation for it were widely misunderstood. Threats of violent action against the withdrawal by settlers and their sympathisers were escalating. Meanwhile, there were growing doubts on the Palestinian side about Israel's real intentions. On the face of it, of course, it was hard to see what could be objected to in any Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian land. There were increasing and partly irrational fears, however, that by some Israeli sleight of hand the end result could be to our disadvantage. At bottom, the question was, if we allowed Israel to point to Gaza and say that they had now withdrawn from Palestinian land as required, could they then say they did not need to change the status quo in the West Bank? Old Palestinian fears were also rekindled because of our memory of the doctrine of 'Gaza first', which we ourselves had espoused after Oslo. We remembered the way in which, after the signing of the Declaration of Principles Agreement over ten years ago, there had been a fear that the Gaza-Jericho agreement, which we had accepted would come first, looked for a while as if it would be the last of our achievements.

What aggravated our fears most was Israel's reticence as to its true intentions. Sharon's government consistently failed to respond

to all our proposals that we needed to resume negotiation over the final status issues, they brushed off every international exhortation to resume the peace process, and they endlessly procrastinated over moving ahead with the roadmap. Of course we understood that the complexities of Israeli party politics, always dictated by the balance of the moment, implied that endless internal party-political wrangling had to happen before any action could be taken. But the reality of what we saw on the ground, including fervent settlement activity on all sides, especially around Jerusalem, alarmed us. Most recently there had been the planned demolition of around a hundred Palestinian homes around the village of Silwan, while in East Jerusalem itself there were constant threats to the area of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

On 21 June 2005 Ariel Sharon invited Abu Mazen for the first time to his home in West Jerusalem. Since he had always refused to receive Abu Ammar, this was the first official meeting between a Palestinian president and an Israeli prime minister. I was part of the Palestinian delegation. My feeling after the meeting was that it had been difficult and tense. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss what had been said at Sharm el-Sheikh and what had or had not been achieved. When we spoke about the disengagement, we were concerned to note that Sharon constantly went off at tangents, raising issues we thought had already been resolved. For example, we were obliged to return yet again to the question of whether or not Israel could accept the proposed Gaza airport and seaport. This was a characteristic typical of Sharon, endlessly retracing the steps of previous negotiations so that in the end it was never easy to discern what he had committed himself to.

As the withdrawal grew closer, I made a statement while I was visiting Gaza on 27 July to the effect that the Palestinian Authority was ready to take control of all areas evacuated by Israel. On 4 August I addressed a rally in Gaza City, organised by Fatah. Speaking to thousands of ordinary Palestinians, I repeated the principle on which I insisted, which was that our struggle concerned the whole of Palestine and would only end with Jerusalem. I reminded my audience of what Abu Ammar used to say: our national struggle would continue until our young people raised the Palestinian flag on Jerusalem's walls, minarets and churches. I said to the Israelis that their sole remaining duty in Gaza was to leave and never return. We would know, I said,

the settlements began. A force of 14,000 Israeli soldiers and police carried out the operation. In the end most settlers, along with those Israeli civilians who had gone to Gaza to express their solidarity with the settlers, left peacefully, although there were some incidents. All six main settlements were evacuated by 22 August and their buildings were demolished. On 23 August, while the withdrawal was actually under way, I went to Damascus to see the leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which we knew were the most powerful political forces in Gaza and the best organised of the factions, to discuss cooperation after the withdrawal. I agreed that there would be no attempt to disarm the factions, but stressed the need for a joint strategy and an attempt to make a post-withdrawal Palestinian administration work.

On 27 August, while receiving a group of European dignitaries including the Dutch prime minister, I found myself having to take issue with a comment made by President Bush that had been relayed to me. President Bush had congratulated Ariel Sharon on what the American leader called his courageous decision to withdraw from Gaza, but had then apparently said that what was needed next was a functional government in Gaza, which, as Bush had put it, would be responsive to the needs of the people. I pointed out that we already had a functioning government in the Palestinian territories, namely the one which I had the honour to lead, under the authority of President Abbas, and that it was important to remember that Gaza was an integral part of the Palestinian whole, and should not be talked about as if it were a separate entity. I asked the European leaders to help us in reminding President Bush of the commitments of the roadmap, which related to the whole of the Palestinian territories. I pointed out that the continuing construction of the separation wall and the expansion and creation of Israeli settlements in the West Bank was making it increasingly difficult for us to have a viable state in the whole of our territory, which was the stated objective of the roadmap.

By 1 September most Israeli troops had left Gaza. On 7 September I held a meeting of my cabinet in Gaza to inform them that Israel had promised to remove all its armed forces from Gaza by 15 September. However, it was in fact on 11 September that the Israeli flag was lowered at the last Israeli military outpost to be abandoned by the troops. In the event, the agricultural installations were left intact, after

how to rebuild our country in Gaza after they had gone. I took the opportunity once more to say that Israeli withdrawal from all our territory was the only option, and that they must not imagine that withdrawal from Gaza alone would satisfy our legitimate demands. The next day, however, while talking to factional leaders, including those of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, I stressed that our immediate duty now was to facilitate Israel's swift and complete withdrawal from Gaza. Nothing must stand in the way of their intention to return Palestinian territory to our full control. The same day, while inspecting our security forces, I said:

Our forces are ready to build our homeland and are ready to ensure that the Israeli withdrawal is orderly and quiet, a first step in the acquisition of freedom for our entire homeland. We have great faith in you. We face significant challenges and this is one we shall overcome. We shall bring an end of the occupation of our land, an irreversible withdrawal. With your help, we shall return order, security and the rule of law to Gaza.

On 8 August I visited Jenin, which was in the area of the northern West Bank that was to be evacuated, and which had been the scene of the terrible confrontation at the refugee camp there in April 2002 when more than 50 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers had been killed. There I met local security chiefs and community leaders, and told them that any attempt by Israel to divide the Palestinian territories into separate areas must be resisted. I stressed that we must not allow ourselves to be distracted by the threat presented by the separation wall, or the Israeli attempt to exclude Jerusalem from the peace process and the expansion of the settlements. As always, I pointed out that the Gaza withdrawal must be only the first stage on the pathway to an independent Palestinian entity, and not an end in itself. The next day, 9 August, President Abbas declared that the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, which had been set for 17 July, would now be held on 25 January 2006. These elections were intended to provide a basis for the new Palestine we hoped would emerge after the Gaza withdrawal, despite all our misgivings about it.

In August 2005 the Israeli withdrawal of its settler population from Gaza took place. At midnight on 14 August, the border crossing from Israel was closed, effectively preventing Israeli civilians from entering the Gaza Strip. On 15 August, the removal of Israeli civilians from

discussion with the Israelis and a donation to purchase them had been made by a group of American Jews. I made a plea that they should not be damaged. 'These greenhouses are for the Palestinian people,' I said, adding that 'we don't want anyone to touch or harm anything that can be useful to our people.' Sadly, some of them were badly damaged by looters in the early days, with reports circulating that members of certain security services failed to stop this and may even have participated in it. Meanwhile, in the northern West Bank, the military operation was complete by 22 September.

Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the withdrawal, violence and civil disturbance became more prevalent in Gaza. There were clashes between elements of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the armed groups that were identified with Fatah. Despite our undertaking in Damascus not to disarm factions, it had seemed appropriate to us to make an attempt to remove weapons from militant Hamas groups, which itself provoked more violence. With constant attacks and even killings, the only way the situation could be described was, frankly, as one of lawlessness. We were at a loss to know how to control the increasing turmoil and to provide security in Gaza. Unfortunately, security forces identified with Fatah also became involved as they found themselves pitted against the Islamic factions. On 27 September I told my regular cabinet meeting that in my view the Israeli closure of Gaza from outside, which had already begun to take effect, and which we had failed to foresee, was partly responsible for the chaotic situation because of the entirely new circumstances in which the people found themselves.

On 3 October the Legislative Council, sitting in Ramallah, voted in favour of a motion of censure against my government, with 43 votes for the motion, five against and five abstentions. The motion criticised what it said was my government's inability to bring under control the chaos caused by armed factions in Gaza and called on Abu Mazen to ask for a new government to be formed. This was of course a blow to me. While the motion was being debated, there came the distressing news from Gaza that members of our own security forces had stormed the parliamentary building in Gaza demanding more support and better supplies from the government, after finding themselves humiliated by being insufficiently armed during a confrontation at a police station with a Hamas armed force. President Abbas wrote to me to say he did

not intend to ask me to step down as there would be no time to set up a new government before the beginning of the election campaign.

Clearly, I considered my position, but on 12 October I announced that my government had no intention of resigning before the mandatory date of 14 December, on which I would be obliged to stand down as prime minister while the campaign took place for the 25 January Legislative Council elections. These would be a major event, as they would be the first elections for the Legislative Council since 1996. The Fatah Central Committee decided it would be better for me to seek a new and fully democratic mandate, however, and on 15 December, having stood down as prime minister, I decided to run as a Fatah candidate in the party list section of the election. My colleague Nabil Shaath took over as acting prime minister. The Fatah list was thrown into confusion when Marwan al-Barghouti, the popular Fatah activist who was still in an Israeli prison, decided to run at the head of a separate party list. President Abbas apparently considered resignation himself, just six weeks ahead of the polls. Meanwhile, Hamas was scoring victories in municipal elections in the West Bank. By 23 December, after much consultation, Abu Mazen made an attempt to reconcile the would-be Fatah dissidents by placing Marwan al-Barghouti at the head of a unified Fatah list with me second. Nevertheless, after much thought, I felt that I would be serving my country better if I continued as caretaker prime minister until the date of the election and on 24 December, while the election campaign continued, I withdrew my candidacy and resumed my post. It was a cause of regret to me that events had taken this turn.

13

ELECTIONS AND AFTER

The process of holding the elections for the Legislative Council that took place on 25 January 2006 was perhaps one of the most important achievements of the government that I headed under President Abbas. The smooth conduct of these elections was indisputably a credit to the Palestinians. Abu Mazen took the decision to hold the elections on this date, on the advice and with the consent of Fatah, Fatah, and the Palestinian government, of which, as prime minister, I had the honour of being at the head, freely took the decision to hold these elections because of our complete commitment to the principle of parliamentary democracy, and as part of our unrelenting effort to help the Palestinian people to exercise their basic rights.

The practical arrangements were made by the independent body we had already established to organise and supervise elections, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC). The European Union's electoral observers made this favourable comment in their report:

The successful conduct of the 25 January 2006 elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) reflected an open and fairly-contested electoral process that was efficiently administered by a professional and independent Palestinian Central Elections Commission (CEC). These elections marked another important milestone in the building of Palestinian democratic institutions, which is a fundamental component in the peace process foreseen in the 2002 roadmap. Overall, the elections

saw impressive voter participation, demonstrating, as with the 2005 presidential election, an overwhelming commitment by the Palestinian people to determine their political future via democratic means.

However, while remarking on the success of the elections, the European observers also noted the adverse circumstances under which they had to be conducted:

This was in spite of the uncertain conditions in which the elections took place involving a background of delay, unacceptable levels of pre-campaign violence, and an occupation that placed restrictions on the exercise of fundamental freedoms related to elections.

At the time of the 1996 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, which had been the first occasion on which the Palestinian people had exercised their right to choose their own elected representatives, the results had been a demonstration of Fatah's popularity and the popular trust enjoyed by Fatah's historical leadership. In 1996, on the basis of a large turnout of voters, Fatah members made up some 80 per cent of the membership of the first elected Palestinian Legislative Council, with 65 out of 88 seats. This was a popular validation of Fatah's ability to lead the Palestinian national struggle. We took this as a mandate for Fatah to occupy the vanguard in the rebirth of the Palestinian nation, to initiate the process of rebuilding, to administer the affairs of the first Palestinian Authority to be freely elected, and to continue with the struggle to regain our legitimate rights, including our right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, according to the principles of international law and based on the unanimity of national will.

Despite its overwhelming majority in the first Legislative Council, Fatah never wavered in its dedication to democracy. Fatah wanted no accusation to be made against us later that we had sought to monopolise or retain authority in an exclusive way. We were always aware that we had to feel the heartbeat of the street, that longed to exercise its natural right to choose its own representatives. We were, however, hopeful of electoral success, because the Fatah movement had always prided itself on being seen to be standing with the people. For this reason, our firm intention had been to return to the ballot boxes in 2000, four years

after the 1996 elections, to seek a further mandate to carry on our struggle. What amounted to almost a reoccupation of our territories by Israel impeded us from holding new elections. These were years that weighed heavily on the shoulders of the Palestinian people. They also undoubtedly contributed to the death of our leader Yasser Arafat, may God have mercy on him.

Instead of continuing for four years as had been planned, the term of the first Legislative Council was extended until 2005. At the close of the Cairo meeting of 15–17 March 2005, the Cairo Declaration had called for new Palestinian elections, and also for the reform of the electoral system in a specific way, which we undertook. In the end, the elections for the Legislative Council were held on 25 January 2006. Though held belatedly, for reasons not of our volition, they were an organic continuation of the elections of 1996 that had followed the Oslo Accords.

At the 25 January elections, as it eventually turned out, a total of 314 candidates competed for the seats in the Legislative Council allocated for election by the two parallel systems. Sixty-six seats were to be elected by constituencies, in which candidates stood as individuals; another sixty-six seats were to be contested under proportional representation by candidates standing as members of party lists. Thus the number of deputies in the Legislative Council would be 132. Eleven separate lists were presented for election. In the proportional representation section in which votes were cast for these eleven lists, Hamas (running as 'Change and Reform') received 440,409 votes, which gave them 29 seats. This was followed by Fatah's unified list, which received 410,554 votes, only some 30,000 fewer, who therefore took 28 seats. That was followed by the PFLP list headed by Abu Ali Mustafa, which received 42,101 votes and three seats. Then came the Alternative list, which was an alliance of the DFLP, the People's Party, Fida and some independents, which took 28,972 votes and two seats; the Independent Palestine list, which received 26,909 votes and also took two seats; and finally the Third Way list, which received 22,862 votes and two seats. No other list reached the defined threshold of 2 per cent. In the constituency section, however, Hamas surged ahead with 45 seats, while Fatah took only 17. Four constituency seats were taken by independent candidates allied to Hamas. The other lists took no constituency seats.

The end result was therefore 74 seats for Hamas, together with the independents who were their faithful allies, and just 45 seats for Fatah, with three for the PFLP, two for the Alternative list, whose elected members included a member of the political bureau of the DFLP and the secretary-general of the People's Party, two seats for Independent Palestine and two seats for the Third Way. In geographical terms, of the 132 members of the Legislative Council, 84 were residents of the West Bank and Jerusalem and 48 were from the Gaza Strip. The Council included 17 women (six from Hamas, eight from Fatah, one from the PFLP, 1 from Independent Palestine, and another from the Third Way).

This was a very different picture from that which had emerged from the first elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council in 1996. In those first elections the PFLP and the DFLP did not participate, and neither, for different reasons, did Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In 1996 these factions did not participate due to reasons of politics and principles of one sort or another. The Council which was elected at that time was therefore virtually of one single political colour, with its membership drawn almost entirely from Fatah.

In 2006, however, the elections were characterised by the participation of the full spectrum of the existing Palestinian movements, with the sole exception of Islamic Jihad. From the point of view of representative democracy this was gratifying and desirable. The climate for such broad participation was at last suitable because of the commitment made to the 'calming', which had reduced the occurrence of violent incidents. The atmosphere was also improved by the determination of all sides to adhere to the democratic principles of election campaigning and to refrain from actions contrary to general order. The determination of Palestinian election officials to monitor and count the voters correctly and in an amicable atmosphere was a remarkable phenomenon of which we can rightly be proud.

The results of the elections of 25 January 2006 were not at all as Fatah would have wanted them. It must be admitted that this outcome was the result of a lengthy catalogue of errors and personal failures on the part of the Palestinian leadership, as Fatah members. This, however, is no excuse. The results were a crushing defeat, from which we nevertheless failed to derive any positive lesson that would

have enabled us to reform our movement. We failed to restructure and rehabilitate Fatah even after the electoral defeat, with the result that it was even more difficult to cope with various later political developments. The outcome of the elections was truly painful for us. However, they were not the end of the story. While we were distracted by other things, the era in which we had been able to bask in the glory of our historical leadership and our exceptional achievements had come to an end. On the other hand, we had not been totally defeated and we did not allow the results to cast us down entirely. The blow we had sustained was not one from which we could not recover. The question was, could we transform the misfortune that had befallen us into an opportunity?

We were perhaps the only national liberation movement ever to stage an election which resulted in the overthrow of the movement that represented its revolutionary traditions. We set aside our established position in order to compete democratically for authority against other forces. We introduced democracy into a society in which the leading priorities were in reality quite different, in light of the occupation to which we were subjected. Our priorities were to liberate our country, with all the steadfastness that entailed, and to resolve our economic and social problems through technocratic endeavour. Was democracy more important than liberation? Was it more pressing than ending the state of chaos and disruption? Was it more crucial than the people's demand for the freedom to work, the freedom of movement and the right to reasonable health care?

Democracy has so far failed us twice. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, those who opposed the work we had done in Oslo used attacks against Israeli civilians to affect the outcome of elections in Israel, prejudicing the Israeli public so that they ousted from government the Israeli Labour Party, our partners in Oslo, and installing the right wing instead. In particular, the murder on 4 November 1995 of Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister of Israel, who had overcome his own deep feelings of antipathy to reach an agreement with us, was a blow to the Palestinian cause. The accession to power in 1996 of the most die-hard anti-Palestinians in Israel, who described the Oslo Accords as a disaster, a betrayal of Israel and a matter of shame, was nothing less than a catastrophe whose consequences we have suffered ever since.

The second time democracy failed us was the victory of Hamas in our elections in 2006, which has proved to be another blow to the Palestinian people.

I must be clear that I went willingly into the elections of January 2006, having set aside my earlier reservations. I faithfully implemented the decisions of the Palestinian leadership and the Fatah Central Committee, and agreed to carry out the elections on the planned date. Before the elections were held, in the interests of upholding democracy and in fulfilment of my promises, my government supervised all matters relating to the elections of local and municipal councils, providing all the necessary financial support and security. We worked assiduously with the Palestinian Central Election Committee and with the security services in order to ensure the Legislative Council elections were properly conducted and supervised.

In the aftermath, like the rest of my brothers, I accepted the results of the elections, which were to say the least not in our favour, and in fact, considering our view of our position in Palestinian society, came as a great political shock. When the polling was over and the votes were counted, my first act was to resign as prime minister. On 26 January I submitted my resignation to President Abbas, who asked me to continue on a caretaker basis until I could hand over to a new government formed by Hamas, the winning party. I congratulated Hamas on its stunning victory and gave the prime minister's office in Ramallah to the deputy prime minister designate, Nasser al-Din al-Shaer. I wished him success and good luck, and offered to assist him in any matter in which he might find my help of value. I also went to Gaza to visit Ismail Haniyyah, the prime minister designate, to congratulate him, and put myself at his disposal to assist with anything that would conduce to the operation of the new government and the fulfilment of its duties.

In the aftermath, though the Hamas victory cost Fatah dearly, the crisis of the Fatah movement may not have been the most disastrous outcome. If the results were a disaster for us, they were yet worse for Israel. I also insist that, while our actions may have partly caused to the crisis, interference by both Israel and the United States also contributed much to the result. We had clearly angered large sectors of the Palestinian people in the way we had administered the Palestinian

Authority and had brought the anger of a protest vote upon ourselves. However, the prospect of a Hamas government now caused yet greater fear among wide swathes of the population and brought an anxiety that was plain to see.

Fatah was judged harshly by the Palestinian electorate, but its achievement must never be forgotten. It was always in the vanguard of the Palestinian struggle. It was Fatah that was able to bring about the rebirth of the Palestinian national identity and the Palestinian entity. It established the first Palestinian Authority on the first area of land we recovered. It opened a bridge that some quarter of a million Palestinians were able to cross over to their homeland. It achieved many successes, and recognised its many failures, but it always remained the heartbeat of the people, the sanctuary of the Palestinian liberation movement, the doyen of the Palestinian factions, and the family of all who were martyred, imprisoned or detained. Its fighters were ever the truest and the most able. For this reason, Fatah had the resilience not to be cast down by the results of the elections. We were able to study the new situation and to regroup.

In addition, despite Hamas' election victory, I insist that it was not we who were anti-democratic. We held the elections of our own free will and lost: our democratic credentials are therefore undisputable. The undemocratic force was Hamas. Can there be a democracy in the world where the ruling party accepted as its democratic rival for power a party that placed its gun on the table while at the same time demanding the continuation of dialogue? Can there be agreement under threat? Is it right to use the mechanisms of democratic choice whilst at the same time retaining the right to resort to arms if necessary?

My reaction, when calm began to return, was to plan to overturn this result on some future occasion so that we could resume our rightful position at the helm of a democratic Palestinian state. This, therefore, was the project to which we turned our minds as soon as the aftermath of the poll was over, and the shock had begun to diminish. Broadly, the plan of action developed by Fatah was as follows:

First, in terms of politics:

1. We concluded that we must respect the results of the election, though democracy is not necessarily just what happens at the ballot box but also consists of good practice and proper behaviour at all times.

2. On the other hand, we must uphold Abu Mazen's policy that the new government respect the agreements and understandings signed by the previous government.
3. We must insist on the need to maintain the commitment of the Palestinian government to the roadmap, which was the only viable international plan and has been agreed at least in principle by all concerned parties.
4. We should be willing to participate in a Hamas-led government, if invited, if it accepted the political programme of the PLO and the national project that is represented by the Palestinian Authority.
5. We should continue to participate in all Palestinian institutions, unless the government repudiates agreements undertaken by its predecessor.

Second, Fatah's internal organisation:

1. We must arrange a general conference of the Fatah movement.
2. We must revitalise Fatah as a movement and seek to recruit more young members.
3. We must devise a proper constitution for Fatah and ensure that party officials are accountable.
4. We must concern ourselves more with the Fatah prisoners in Israeli jails, and respect their moral authority. We need their support in future political stands.

Third, the PLO:

1. We must continue to insist that the PLO is the highest authority to which the Palestinian Authority should defer, whoever forms the government.
2. We must insist that only the PLO is authorised to conduct negotiations and sign agreements in relation to Palestinian independence.
3. While the Palestinian National Council is unable to meet, the Central Council of the PLO must meet regularly.
4. The Executive Committee of the PLO should use its regular meetings to establish the authority of the PLO in a tangible and visible manner.

Fourth, the current situation:

1. We must re-emphasise the authority of the Palestinian presidency in all security matters.
2. The president should govern by decree where this is permitted by the Basic Law, in other words to preserve the authority of the presidency and protect the existing constitutional arrangements from interference.

3. We must intensify our dialogue with all parties and lists represented in the Legislative Council, and all institutions active in Palestinian political life, in order to broaden the support base of the PLO, and to consult widely on all matters related to the Palestinian Authority.
4. We must safeguard the structure of our representation abroad by placing it directly under the authority of the presidency.

Fifth, international relations:

1. We must ask international donors not to punish the Palestinian people by suspending their aid.
2. We must put pressure on Israel, through the Quartet, to continue its commitment to transfer the payments that are due to the Palestinian Authority.
3. We must maintain our contact with the Quartet and urge it to continue its efforts to ensure the implementation of the roadmap.
4. The President should continue to visit Arab and Islamic countries as the representative of Palestine, to ensure that our fraternal ties with such states are not usurped by others.

Despite having elaborated these plans, in day-to-day terms we continued our policy of cooperation with the succeeding government. The President and I instructed all ministers to hand over their ministries and their files, in accordance with the correct administrative procedures. On 25 March 2006 I met the prime minister elect, Ismail Haniyyah, and Mahmoud al-Zahar, the foreign minister designate in the new government. I confirmed the readiness of our government to hand everything over in good order to the new prime minister and his cabinet as soon as all constitutional procedures were completed. I expressed my best wishes for their success and repeated to them that we would be at the disposal of the new government if they needed us, and would willingly provide any help that we might be asked for.

Ismail Haniyyah confirmed that, as he put it, 'political differences which may arise between the presidential and governmental institutions will be resolved through dialogue, cooperation and understanding. Hamas will not seek to create any constitutional crises and does not wish there to be any trouble in any Palestinian arena.' He emphasised his desire for good relations with the President, and said that any apparent conflict would be resolved in a way that would serve the higher interests of the Palestinian people. He complemented our work

in the fields of administration, finance and regulation, and he said that 'the new government would benefit enormously from them and build on them'. He added that his new government expected to make changes in the fields of law and the judiciary but would act with integrity.

In a statement he made after the meeting, he said we 'had dealt with some of the problems for which we will strive to find a solution'. He noted that we had discussed national goals and how to deal with Israel's apparent intention to create what they referred to as a Palestinian state with temporary borders. He discussed the priorities in internal affairs, emphasising the importance of protecting our national unity. He said he wished to deal with issues relating to internal security and unemployment, as well as improve the lives of the people so as to ensure a better life for the Palestinian people in the future.

Ismail Haniyyah expressed his pleasure at our meeting and thanked my readiness, and that of my ministers, to place our expertise and ideas at the disposal of his government. He also took the opportunity to deny what some media reports had alleged, that President Abbas had sent him a letter warning that his government would have no future unless it negotiated with Israel. 'This is not true,' he said, 'and was not part of the content of any letter President Abbas has sent to me.'

On 26 March 2006 I resigned and handed over power to the new prime minister. On 30 March 2006 Ismail Haniyyah won a vote of confidence for his cabinet in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Those of the Council's members who were unable to leave Gaza because of Israeli restrictions swore the constitutional oath by video link. In the governmental offices in Gaza, the new prime minister and his cabinet swore the constitutional oath before President Abbas, who had gone to Gaza for the purpose, along with Yasser Abed Rabbo, representing the Executive Committee of the PLO and Zakariyyah Agha, representing the Fatah Central Committee. Those of the new ministers based in the West Bank and Jerusalem swore the constitutional oath at the Muqataa headquarters in Ramallah, with a video link to President Abbas in Gaza. The President was represented in Ramallah by the secretary-general of the presidency, al-Tayyib Abdul Rahim, as well as by the president of the High Judicial Council, the president of the Legislative Council, Aziz al-Duwayk, and members of the Executive Committee of the PLO.

As soon as all was done, I met Nasser al-Din al-Shaer, the minister for education and deputy prime minister in the Hamas government, who was also an elected Hamas member of the Legislative Council. I arranged a short ceremony during which, in the absence of Ismail Haniyyah, who was unable to leave Gaza, I formally handed over the prime minister's offices in Ramallah to him. During the meeting I reviewed the achievements of our government and gave him a written report on our work. I emphasised the readiness of the Palestinian administrative system we had painstakingly set up to continue to work under the direction of the new government, drawing attention to its structure and efficiency.

I highlighted once more the challenges and dangers facing Palestine, foremost among which were Israel's threats to impose unilateral measures, which might well include the declaration of the existence of a temporary Palestinian state with provisional boundaries, which could imply a unilateral settlement of some or all of the final status issues. I summarised all the other difficulties we faced, such as day-to-day Israeli aggressive operations, the separation wall, and the continuing existence of the military checkpoints which divided our homeland into isolated cantons, as well as the Judaisation of Jerusalem. I also listed our top priorities, which included security, health, education and economic growth, as well as carrying on with the process of political reform. I emphasised the importance of national unity and of the need to keep in mind common Palestinian wishes, at the forefront of which was the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. I spoke about the framework in which our political programme had been carried out, and underlined the status of the PLO, which I described as a moral entity that represented Palestine in the absence of the political entity that we sought. I concluded with a reiteration of my assurance that the outgoing Fatah-led government was willingly handing over its responsibilities because of our absolute belief in the principle of the voluntary transfer of powers to our political opponents after an electoral defeat. Once more, I wished the new government success.

Nasser al-Din al-Shaer was kind enough to express his respect, and that of the new government, for my person and my standing, emphasising his appreciation of my role. He spoke movingly of the memory of our eternal leader, the martyr Yasser Arafat, and

also conveyed his esteem for President Abbas. He repeated his government's commitment to uphold the law, abide by the constitution and safeguard legitimacy, and declared it would act in full cooperation with the presidency, the PLO, the Legislative Council and other Palestinian institutions. He said his government represented the Palestinian people and not one faction alone. They would continue, he added, to build on our achievements, and would do nothing to harm what had already been achieved. His government would always act in the interests of the Palestinian cause, and would consult all interested parties and concerned institutions.

The handover to the new government was thus completed, with an ease and transparency that was widely praised. This brought an end to our Fatah government, and also ended the period in which I was the prime minister in the Palestinian government. Though I would always do what I could to benefit the Palestinian people and to further the Palestinian cause, others had to bear the formal responsibility.

CONCLUSION

During my time as prime minister, the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords between the government of Israel and the PLO took place. There was, however, no celebration of the decade that had elapsed since this historic event; on the contrary, there was silence. Depression at the loss of hope and enthusiasm, and at the increasing complexity of the situation, were our main emotions as we looked back on an event that had been described at the time as equivalent in importance to the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was an indication of its magnitude as a turning point in the history of the current conflict in the Middle East and of the breadth of the horizons that it opened up for both the Palestinians and the Israelis. The two sides had appeared at last to be in a position where they could substitute a new relationship built on peace, cooperation, coexistence, trust-building and prosperity for the previous relationship based on hatred, enmity, exclusion and displacement.

It may be that the best way to recapitulate the stages of the final phase of my personal experience is to look back at this historic agreement, and at the commitments that underlay such a transformation – in the achievement of which I had the honour to participate – contrasting it with the threats and dangers of the current situation in our region. The conclusions to be drawn from any comparison will illustrate that the violent history of the Middle East conflict is nothing less than a lengthy catalogue of wasted chances, full of opportunities for peace that

have been squandered. Such opportunities have been wasted not only by the two sides directly involved in the conflict, making the Middle East the cradle of tension, violence and international terror, but also by the international community and particularly by the United States, which has long sought merely to keep the conflict under control and to diminish its intensity instead of using its enormous influence on the parties concerned to solve it once and for all.

I do not seek in this concluding chapter to present a full historical account. There is insufficient room here to demonstrate how responsibility must be jointly borne by all the parties that face the challenge of a crisis which continues to undermine the present and threaten the future of the region. These parties include the Arabs, the United States and the wider international community. There should be no apportionment of blame between us over the loss of the various opportunities that have presented themselves, and no inquiry into who bears the responsibility for fuelling the conflict, raising it to new levels of intractability. We are already well aware that peace, which may still be within reach today or tomorrow, would have been simpler to achieve in former times, before the recent vast amount of bloodshed, pain, fear and destruction.

For these reasons, we may be sure that this conflict – a clash of interests, instincts and desires which has already endured for more than a century – is destined to continue for an indefinite period with even greater human and material cost, and without any change in its essentials. In the end, there are truths that will impose themselves. These truths are the inescapable facts of geography and demography and the imperatives of history, as well as the emerging reality that neither side is able to oust or defeat the other, despite the desire prevalent among some on both sides to do just that.

It will suffice here to say that in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip today four million Palestinian citizens live out their lives under the harshest of conditions while maintaining their attachment to legitimate national rights. This has been done in the face of the savagery of the horrific machine of Israeli oppression, which has nevertheless failed either to break their overwhelming will or to blunt their determination to rid themselves of the hateful Israeli occupation, which, incidentally, is the last occupation anywhere on earth. We can be sure, therefore,

that an imposed solution, and the exercise of force, arbitrary rule, expropriation of land and the construction of settlements have not been and will not be sufficient to achieve security and peace for the Israelis. On the contrary, these practices, characteristic of an antiquated colonialist mentality and a pessimistic vision of the future, have led only to the intensification of the conflict and of the level of enmity and hatred. Above all, they have brought into being a new force, importing it into a conflict that already involved many actors, comprising many creeds and interests and conditioned by various objectives and calculations.

There is insufficient space here to return to the roots of the conflict that presently rages in our lands, now fiercer than ever before, or to review our history, burdened as it is with the tragedy of war, violence and conflict, or to relate the painful story of the Palestinian people, who see themselves as victims reduced to silence in the face of their torturers. I do not wish to reopen a sterile argument about the history of this bitter conflict, or to rehearse its history, with all its truths and falsehoods and concomitant mutual recrimination. Neither do I wish to defend here the justice of the cause of the Palestinian people, deprived of the right to the freedom and independence enjoyed by others. Nor shall I present the arguments for the legitimacy of their just national struggle, attacked by some as terrorism, but in reality an honest and profoundly felt pursuit of their destiny, and ultimately peace. All this seems to me, by now, to be as blindingly obvious as the midday sun.

Within the context of the peace process, to paraphrase the poet Mutanabbi, 'the winds did not bring what the ships desired'. Instead they brought violent storms from all directions, preventing the Palestinian ship of state from reaching the expected safe port. I will not permit myself to lay all the responsibility for the faltering of the peace process on the shoulders of the other side alone. We have the moral courage to admit that we share this responsibility, at various times and places and from one aspect or another. We also have the courage, as ever, to criticise ourselves, correct our situation and review our path, be it in respect of an incorrect decision or a mistaken assumption, a miscalculation or a hasty action, or an unjustifiable policy. Were it our responsibility alone, however, we would not have returned to the cycle

of violent action and reaction, and would have avoided the mutual bloodshed driven by hatred, revenge, retribution and prejudice.

Recalling certain recent and memorable events, and the drawing of comparisons, will help us to understand. After Israel reoccupied our cities, villages and refugee camps at the beginning of 2002, purportedly in response to bombing incidents within their 'green line', there was an important public debate – the first of its kind – in Palestinian society. This was against the background of the changes in the international scene after the events of 11 September 2001, and in the light of an internal situation that foretold impending disaster. Expressing themselves by various means, leaders of Palestinian society played their part in this, together with the intellectual and social elite, including political figures, officials, intellectuals, the educated classes, university professors, journalists and others. The debate concerned the bombings, which had already been condemned officially by the Palestinian Authority in a statement that did not shrink from condemning them as terrorist attacks that were harmful to the image of our national struggle as just and legitimate. These attacks were seen to be no different from any other attack on innocent civilians, including those by the Israeli army and the systematic attacks on Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers.

The early stages of this internal public dialogue – which included every sector of Palestinian society and its leading figures, and was gaining increasing support within official circles and from various sections of the Palestinian people – culminated in a statement published in the local newspapers and in the Arab press, signed by more than one hundred prominent and influential Palestinian personalities, in which the signatories condemned such attacks and called for them to be repudiated. This broadened the discussion of such actions in Palestinian and wider Arab circles. Nevertheless, as I see it, instead of basing its actions on its long-term interests, Israel escalated its aggression to a level not seen before the bombings, with the demolition of houses, the bulldozing of farms and a tightening of the siege, with further closures and curfews. This undermined the forces of Palestinian moderation and weakened their position beyond recognition.

Israel's action, not an isolated development in the long history of similar events, and the Palestinian reaction to it nevertheless serves as an example of the special vitality of Palestinian society, which was

not weakened by the oppression of the occupation. Israel was not able to destroy the remaining Palestinian civil institutions and their social power, so that Palestinian society brought to bear its capacity to criticise, and self-criticise, to review its positions and its policies and to embark on the process of assigning responsibility. This was followed through with a high level of transparency, despite the heavy burden of the occupation and the harsh practice of collective punishment that was methodically and systematically deployed by Israel, which did not attract the international condemnation it merited. Such condemnation might have curbed the level of Israeli oppression and the arbitrary actions it undertook daily.

It is easy to list events and developments through which Israel has diverged from the path of dialogue and understanding and contradicted the agreements made. The construction of what I choose to call the Apartheid Wall in the heart of the West Bank and Jerusalem, together with the continuing appropriation of land, the building and expansion of settlements, and the continuation of attacks on the Islamic Holy Places are the best illustration of Israel's expansionist and colonialist mentality, which uses security as its excuse to annex ever more of the land Israel has occupied. It is this policy that stands in the way of the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state, while the Israeli government shrugs off all international criticism, including from the United States, and disregards the condemnation of the International Court of Justice of an expansionist and colonialist programme that seeks to impose new facts on the ground, exacerbating the daily suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian people. All this has been able to take place because Israel is aware that international criticism is just talk, to be carried away on the wind – no action follows.

Perhaps the hypocrisy and indifference the world has shown in turning its back on the injustice and racial discrimination directed at our people, together with the incomprehensible and unjustified international tolerance of Israel's curtailment of the most basic of Palestinian human rights, has aggravated the sense of injustice of most Palestinians and their deep-seated conviction of having been robbed. It has certainly led to extremism, which it has furnished with further pretexts to take the conflict back to square one and even beyond, against the background of Palestinian misery, poverty and enforced

idleness, and the deterioration of the economy to shocking levels. The international powers, including the United States, whose word alone is heeded in Israel, are failing to implement their real duty, to halt this rapid process of deterioration. The disregard on the part of the United States of Israel's actions, and the resulting obliteration of every possibility of peace, has further strengthened Israel's instinctive inclination towards extremism and obstinacy, and fed its arrogance. The result has been an unprecedented growth in the establishment of Israeli settlements, which has only served to deepen yet further Palestinian feelings of injustice and oppression.

In the course of this book, following my earlier accounts of the two agreements reached at Oslo and Camp David and the multilateral negotiations, I have sought to shed light on a period devoid of any meaningful negotiations. I have drawn particular attention to various American initiatives and interventions and have also examined the activities of the Quartet, including the drafting of the Road Map. I have also looked at the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, which was supposed to be a trial run for a similar process to be initiated by Israel, and at unilateral Israeli proposals such as the project for a state with temporary borders, the George Mitchell plan, the Tenet Understandings and the suggestions drawn up by Anthony Zinni, as well as the subterfuges employed by Ariel Sharon to avoid the implementation of Tenet's and Zinni's proposals. All these developments have now been consigned to the archives of the Middle East crisis and have been overtaken by the rapid escalation of violence in an already highly volatile region. A proposal none of us have forgotten, however, was the initiative proposed by President George Bush in June 2002, when he undertook to establish a democratic and prosperous Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. A further memorable step was the Quartet's Road Map, intended to create the conditions for the implementation of the American presidential initiative and adopted by the Security Council in its resolution 1515. Nor can we overlook the Arab Peace Initiative.

In this present account, I have spoken about the paths that led to the Road Map, with a discussion of its origins and its intended implementation, now postponed into an unknown future. I have also dedicated a part of this present book to the phases of my experience as head of the Palestinian government in the time of the late Palestinian

leader, President Yasser Arafat, as well as that of President Mahmoud Abbas. I have discussed many developments that took place in this period, with both their positive and negative implications, as well as other aspects of my experience in government, such as the reform of the Palestinian political system, the plan for disengagement from the Gaza Strip, the legal struggle at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, internal Palestinian relations and the national dialogue. I conclude my account with the events of the second legislative elections at the beginning of 2006.

Following on from my general evaluation of all the events in which I participated or to which I was a witness, it is my duty at the end of this book to speak of a vision of the future – not entirely a personal one – rather than to delve ever deeper into a past that refuses to be ignored. My intention is to propose some ideas that could serve as an appropriate foundation for the future, not in order to divert blame from myself or evade responsibility, but in the first place to enrich the dialogue and make further contributions to it, to suggest alternatives, to examine choices and to analyse the conclusions. In short, I wish to do all that can be done to rebuild a Palestinian reality that would be more closely integrated and more effective in confronting the never-ending difficulties and challenges that face the Palestinian people in the present and cause anxiety for the future.

For this reason, I must state that we are obliged, without hesitation or ambiguity, to undertake a 'self-assessment'. Our duty is to look reality in the face and always to call things by their real names. A number of points need to be made regarding our circumstances:

1. We are a people under occupation and we have a national authority that is also under occupation.
2. We have long been under siege but today we are subject to a siege that is worse than ever before: a siege strengthened by brute military force and unprecedented measures of arbitrary oppression.
3. We are divided in a way unprecedented in our national history, after truly shocking internal strife.
4. We face a choice between two avenues that differ in their political vision, and in their understanding of the national, regional and international position. We therefore face an unprecedented split in the Palestinian political system.

5. We face the challenge of Israel's continuing unilateral project of expropriation and colonisation, which denies us our legitimate rights while appropriating our land and taking control of our Holy Places.

In conclusion, we are today apparently a people defenceless against oppression and whose land is violated. We appear destined to be the eternal victims of occupation; no tears, however, are shed for us and no voice is raised in sorrow for our martyrs or in protest against the oppression and organised state terrorism perpetrated against us.

There is no doubt that we face an existential crisis recalling the horrors of the 'Nakba' (Catastrophe) which began six bitter decades ago and which has not since then been halted or reversed by any just exercise of international will.

Ultimately we are at the mercy of a hypocritical, oppressive and abusive international alliance that holds us by the throat and blackmails us by means of its control over our livelihoods, relentlessly tightening its grip on us in broad daylight.

We must also accept the conclusion that our dear brethren within the international Islamic community are unable to offer us any alternative, or even to help our poor citizens, even if they had the will to do so.

In the light of all the above, and in the interests of performing assessments and comparisons appropriate to reaching effective solutions to this worsening crisis, we must once more, while edging towards the desired solution, perceive the realities as they truly are and not as we would wish them to be. This is necessary in order to reach conclusions and learn lessons, and not to foster depression, despair and surrender.

The reality we see and feel requires us to set aside niceties and to reject once and for all partial remedies that serve only to soothe the pain of a deep wound prone to infection, and threatening to poison the entire Palestinian body.

There is no doubt that any conceivable solution to this crisis must entail a return to the historical agreements to which the Palestinian people have consented in the past. They have always been, and continue to be, attached to these, and regard them as their beacons on the road to liberation and the restoration of their legitimate national rights. These include their right to return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

Conclusion

These historical agreements have common permanent values and objectives that cannot be overstated. These need to be firmly restated, since they must be the principles of any consensus, and will remain the Palestinian nation's constant values and objectives under all circumstances. These are as follows:

1. The Palestinian people in their homeland and in exile will seek, by all legitimate means, to liberate their land and achieve their right to freedom, return and independence. The Palestinian people will also seek self-determination, including its right to establish its own independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, including all the territories occupied in 1967, in addition to a guarantee of the return of Palestinian refugees and of the liberation of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees, justifying all of this on the basis of our people's historical right to our fathers' and grandfathers' land, on the Covenant of the United Nations, on international law, on the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and on what international legitimacy has guaranteed.

In, addition the Palestinian people must enjoy the following further rights:

2. To continue its resistance in the territories occupied in 1967, which may accompany any appropriate political and diplomatic negotiations that pursue a clear and defined vision, carried out by an administration committed to these positions; and to continue its popular resistance against the occupation in all its manifestations, presence and policies and to widen the participation in this popular resistance of all sectors, parties and groups within Palestinian society, as well as the general population, within the boundaries of an agreed policy and programme.
3. To preserve and strengthen its National Authority, since it is the nucleus of the future Palestinian state. The Authority has been built by our people through their struggle, their sacrifices and the blood and suffering of their sons. The highest national interest dictates the provisional constitution of the Palestinian Authority, with the laws that are in effect, as well as the imperative of continuing the comprehensive reform process initiated by previous governments, particularly within the judicial apparatus, together with respect for the judiciary at all levels, the implementation of their decisions and the reinforcement of the sovereignty of law.

4. To maintain its commitment to the path of democracy, with regular elections for the Presidency, the Legislative Council, the National Council and the local and municipal councils, to be held whenever possible, which will be free, democratic and implemented according to the law, in order to promote our rights and the struggle of our people towards liberation and freedom. In addition, to respect the principle of the peaceful transfer of power, to undertake to protect the Palestinian democratic experience, to respect democratic decisions and their results, to respect the sovereignty of the law and all necessary and general freedoms, including the freedom of expression and of the media. To treat all citizens equally in terms of rights and duties without discrimination and to protect the gains made by women and to develop and strengthen them.
5. To emphasise Palestinian national unity and national dialogue as the fundamental prerequisites of success and victory and to reject all forms of division and dissent, rejecting all that leads to internal strife and condemning the use of arms, on no matter what excuse, to settle internal disputes, prohibiting the use of arms between the people of a single nation and stressing the prohibition on the shedding by Palestinians of Palestinian blood. In addition, to remain committed to dialogue as the only means for settling disputes and to the right to express opinions with transparency and without restrictions.

Turning from political diagnosis to our national circumstances, a close examination of the position of Fatah on the eve of the second legislative elections as the principal guardian of the Palestinian national project (an issue which will require detailed study, analysis and review in another book), leads me to conclude without hesitation that Fatah, as it existed during the period of its launch and establishment in the 1960s, and subsequently throughout its struggle during the 1970s and 1980s, is in truth the mother of Palestinian movements. In its responsible and objective approach, it has given expression to the heartfelt sentiments of the Palestinian people and to the profundity of their desire for national liberation, the retrieval of the occupied territories and the achievement of independence. On its broad shoulders, Fatah has carried the Palestinian national project with a competence and integrity that are widely recognised. It was for this reason that the Palestinian people, both inside the homeland and in the diaspora, offered it the reins of leadership of their own

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free will, pinning their ambitions for freedom and independence to Fatah's banner.

Throughout a glorious struggle that has lasted for many decades and continues still in the present day, Fatah has continued to accrue gains and store up national assets. It has been instrumental in all the most crucial and significant turning points in the life of the Palestinian people. With the first bullet fired in the independence struggle, it laid the foundation stone of the restoration of Palestinian identity and the restoration of Palestine, taking upon itself the reins of independent national decision-making and dedicating itself to the defence to the death of the new Palestinian entity. It rescued the Palestinian people from the place to which history had relegated them, establishing it anew in real and present geography. It took a marginalised and divided population and restored it to full political presence, transforming the Palestinians from oppressed and embattled refugees into a combative and independent people. It has led them from the era of revolutionary democracy into the new period of constitutional democracy, from the age of revolution into the age of the establishment of the state.

In the midst of all these achievements, however, Fatah has had its inadequacies. Some of these have been major, such as its failure in the legislative and municipal elections and the loss of the Gaza Strip. There have been differences in points of view and positions within Fatah, particularly in the period after the death of its martyred founding leader, Yasser Arafat, as well as more recently. These have been the result of neglect within its organisation and of insufficient respect for the decisions of its leadership, as well as the absence of new blood among its leading figures. The consequence of this has been a lack of initiative and creativity: Fatah's leaders and cadres had begun to operate within the framework of the Palestinian Authority, and neglected the organisation of the movement itself. This led to a certain distance between the leadership and the population at large, which has always been the source of Fatah's power. I shall restrict myself here to a discussion of seven factors which in my opinion constitute the most important reasons for our failures, the inevitable result of mistakes made by Fatah, and left uncorrected long enough to cause negative repercussions for itself and the Palestinian national entity. These factors are:

1. Fatah and the Palestinian Authority became wholly amalgamated. The two structures merged, from the base of their organisational pyramids to their apex, to become a single unified entity. All administrative and organisational differences between them disappeared, to the extent that the Palestinian Authority, with its multiplicity of organisations, apparatuses and administrations, appeared to be in effect the 'Fatah Authority'. However, every success of the Palestinian Authority was counted as a success for itself alone, while every failure was seen as reflecting on the standing of Fatah and on its ability to lead the Palestinian people through a period that was beset with grave difficulties and serious challenges.

Fatah's only choice, however, was to stand firm and to increase the visibility of its participation in the unprecedented challenge of making a success of the Palestinian Authority and of the construction of its own various organisational structures so that success on the part of the Palestinian Authority would be understood as a success for Fatah, though this would entail that any failure on the Palestinian Authority's part would still inevitably be seen as Fatah's. The seamless overlap between the Palestinian Authority and Fatah continued to be a heavy burden on Fatah's agenda, which led us to neglect our work in Fatah (as distinct from our responsibilities in the Palestinian Authority), both as leaders and as cadres at all levels.

2. There was an organisational decline within Fatah and a lack of new blood in the leadership, both at the top level and among the middle cadres, that resulted not only from our thankless entanglement in the structure of the Palestinian Authority, but also from our failure to establish an effective central organisation within Fatah, which would have served to reinforce the legitimacy of Fatah's leadership and to provide a framework for the necessary functioning of its various organisational structures.

It may be that the internal disputes Fatah has undergone – including the disputes that erupted between its leaders on the eve of the second legislative elections, with the appearance of competing Fatah electoral lists – together with other egregious organisational failures and conflicts of loyalty within the movement were the reason for Fatah's poor results in those elections and served as a conclusive demonstration of the organisational decline that the movement was experiencing. There was, in addition, among Fatah's leaders and cadres, an undeniable increase in selfishness, individualism, egoism and in the attempt to exercise a monopoly on power.

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3. The faltering peace process and the resultant narrowing of the political horizon have had broad negative repercussions for the Palestinian Authority and therefore for Fatah, to which the national project and the institution of the Palestinian Authority in the last resort belonged. The shortcomings of the peace process also cast a shadow over the security of the people and their economic welfare, thus bringing these problems to the attention of the population, on whom many burdens weighed ever heavier: the expansion in Israeli settlements, Israel's economic blockade, the destruction of Palestinian property, the construction of the Wall, the increasing Judaisation of Jerusalem, the closure of crossing points and other oppressive measures such as invasions, arrests, assassinations and daily raids. All of this has provided a tangible demonstration of the deterioration of the peace process and the looming possibility that its direction could even be reversed.
4. Fatah neglected its relationship with and concern for the population, a responsibility which Fatah had shouldered in addition to its concern for the plight of Palestinian refugees in the diaspora before the return to the homeland.

It was clear that Fatah, which had transferred itself bag and baggage to the homeland of our fathers and grandfathers, was not fully able to grasp the nature of its new popular base, whose social priorities had different requirements and conditions to those of Fatah's popular base within the refugee population abroad. This became clear in the first few years after the founding of the Palestinian Authority, when Fatah's preoccupation with building the Palestinian Authority was slowly distancing it from the anxieties of the population and from their daily interests. Fatah was too ready to lay the burden of this responsibility on the shoulders of the newly established Palestinian Authority.

5. Fatah's national discourse began to take on the metaphysical characteristics of the discourse of opposition, regardless of whether this was aligned with Fatah's overall position, particularly during the second Intifada, when rhetoric of this kind began to attract the masses, who were able to see for themselves how the hopes they had pinned to the peace project were vanishing.

This process was given impetus by Israel's exaggerated use of force and the intrusive nature of its methods of control, which formed part of a systematic programme to weaken the structure of the Palestinian Authority and undermine its image in the eyes of a Palestinian population inclining ever further towards open confrontation with the brutal forces of the occupation.

6. There has been a failure of commitment within Fatah's organisation and its activities that has led us to fail to channel our intrinsic energy into the construction of a strong hierarchical movement, which would have preserved Fatah's vitality and instrumentalised the increasing abilities of its younger members, thus increasing its attractiveness to the population. The creation of an effective movement would have opened the way for the promotion of the upcoming generations within the hierarchy and their progressive assumption of responsibility.
7. Fatah's programme lacked the development of links between its political work and the activities of the struggle. This should have taken a number of forms, including the maintenance of a Fatah presence visible to its broad popular base, the emphasis of the movement's combatant aspect, the encouragement of the higher leadership to understand the needs of the people, and the reorganisation of the movement's priorities, especially at a time when Israel's aggression was tending to weaken the social fabric and destroy the capacity of the population to remain steadfast and maintain their resistance.

As I come to the close of this historical analysis, I must reiterate that the Road Map was indubitably the primary event of the period of which I have given an account. In my review I have examined the circumstances that led eventually to the Road Map, beginning with the political deadlock that resulted from the failure of Camp David and the developments that ensued, glancing briefly at some aspects and offering detailed analysis of others. I have also looked at the part played by the regional and international repercussions of the events of 11 September 2001, at the Arab Peace Initiative, and in particular at the American contributions and interventions during the period 2000–6.

There is no doubt that the process that led to the Road Map originated with the Mitchell Committee Report. The elements that would eventually comprise the Road Map were in due course clarified during the series of American visits to the PLO, which included the visits of Colin Powell, the secretary of state, and of General Anthony Zinni, together with missions by other American officials and diplomats whose intervention in Middle Eastern events continued for a number of years.

However, perhaps the initial impetus for the actual formulation of the Road Map was President Bush's vision concerning what has come

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to be known as the two-state solution, which was later adopted by the Quartet and the UN Security Council. It could be said that this was the origin of the most recent diplomatic efforts to bring the historical Middle East conflict to a conclusion and to achieve an honourable and peaceful settlement acceptable to the parties in this bloody and bitter regional conflict, already a number of decades old before the appearance of this American presidential vision.

In the pages of this account, I have referred to the basic events and developments that relate to or stem from President Bush's vision of two states. These have included the modification of the Palestinian political system with the introduction of the post of prime minister, and the experience of Mahmoud Abbas as the occupant of that position. I have also discussed my own time as prime minister of the Palestinian Authority at the head of three administrations during the presidencies of Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen. I have also looked at what has come to be known as the Abu Ala–Peres Document, and at the circumstances of the death of our founding leader and national symbol, Yasser Arafat, and the subsequent election of Abu Mazen as the president of the Palestinian Authority.

I have in addition given an account of the significant events of my premiership, including the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the review of the legality of the Apartheid Wall at the International Court of Justice in the Hague, and at the issues of national dialogue and Palestinian internal relations during this perilous period, which has begun to appear in retrospect as the start of a more dangerous phase in Palestinian political life, characterised by the turmoil that followed the second legislative elections at the beginning of 2006.

I have concluded my analysis with the results of the legislative elections in which Hamas won the majority of seats in the Legislative Council. Further discussion must await the evaluation of the era that will follow the resolution of the internal division within Palestine between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which was the subject of the negotiations with the former Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, which have become known as the Annapolis Talks – at which I led the Palestinian delegation – together with the further negotiations that ensued.

If the emergence of a Road Map has been illuminated in the course of this account, and if light has been shed on some of the diversions

and byways of the six years revealed by this story, one thing that is certain is that any observer will need to see the end points of this Road. These have been obscured by the drifting sands of shifts, developments, diversions and transformations in the international and regional situation, so that it could be asked, in the greatest of pain and anguish, whether there is such a thing as a Road Map. Indeed, was there ever at bottom such a thing as a Road, while its end point remained out of view, not so much because the fog of politics has for a long time obscured it, but because of developments that changed the signposts along the way, and which may indeed have squandered the opportunities it might have represented.

APPENDIX 1

Documents Relevant to the Text

1 October 2000

Letter from Abu Ala to President Arafat

My brother the President, may God preserve you, greetings,

As the Intifada has now entered its second month, I believe that it would be useful for us to propose a Palestinian peace initiative covering the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the re-establishment of peace, coexistence and normal relations with the Israelis. Based on my experience, I hereby propose an initiative as a basis for negotiation with the American administration in the first instance and then with Israel, if Israel truly desires a just and comprehensive peace. It is a political proposal to calm the situation between Palestine and Israel, returning the peace process to its natural course.

First: the aim of this initiative is to restore security and stability between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel, to halt all acts of violence and to restore the peace process to its natural course, according to rules that would guarantee its success.

Second: this proposal and its contents should be seen as a single unit, to be executed according to the proposed security schedule.

Third: the Israeli and Palestinian sides will undertake to carry out the following, each in the areas that concern them:

First, confidence building procedures:

In order to restore the spirit of the agreements and their execution, and re-initiate confidence building, the government of Israel will immediately take the following steps:

Make a declaration stating an end to all settlement activities, the confiscation of land and the construction of bypass roads.

Peace Negotiations in Palestine

Release all prisoners and those detained.

Hand over all Area B land to complete Palestinian sovereignty and end the system of division into A, B and C.

Review financial and monetary agreements and end the retention of tax revenue due to the Palestinians.

Re-examine and modify the agreements on international crossing points: the airport, the Rafah crossing with Egypt and the Karama crossing with Jordan and end their closure.

Remove checkpoints between the Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, especially around Jerusalem. Cease to prevent citizens from going to pray in the Holy City.

Apply the Fourth Geneva Convention to the population of the occupied Palestinian territories and seek to reach a permanent agreement.

Carry out the third redeployment according to the ratified agreements, of which the most recent is the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement.

Second, the end of aggressive operations and violence:

As soon as a declaration is made to implement the actions specified in the first section:

The Palestinian president and the Israeli prime minister will each make a statement stating in the strongest terms the need to halt all acts of violence and aggression and return to normal.

All operational committees relating to coordination and cooperation will resume their activities, especially in relation to security. This will be monitored by a team of international observers.

An international commission of investigation will undertake to find the reasons for the clashes in order to avoid their recurrence.

Third, the peace process:

The United Nations and those countries which sponsor the peace process will call for an international conference which will be attended by representatives of the United Nations, the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union, China, Egypt and Jordan, in addition to the parties to the conflict, to promote the achievement of a permanent agreement embodying a peaceful settlement and to guarantee that such an agreement is implemented.

The conference will meet for some days at leadership level to assume responsibility for the continuation of the negotiations, determine a

Appendix 1: Documents Relevant to the Text

time limit within which an agreement is to be reached and lay down what the agreement should contain and a working agenda.

The conference will then continue for two weeks at a ministerial level to help the parties to the conflict to reach an agreement.

The international leaders should then reassemble to address any areas in which agreement has not been reached and endorse agreements which have been made, including the determination of an arbitration mechanism and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism.

4 October 2000

Paris summit meeting (President Arafat–Prime Minister Barak)

Points of Understanding

1. Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak will take steps to end the current confrontation, maintain calm and prevent a re-occurrence of recent events that have resulted in needless deaths and caused tremendous loss and suffering.
2. There will be permanent consultation on security between the two sides to ensure cooperation on all security issues. There will be a channel for all security officials to discuss practical security questions, avert problems, and evaluate performance. The United States will facilitate these meetings as necessary.
3. The two sides commit themselves to the reduction and progressive elimination of friction and confrontation. At key flashpoints, the security committee will work out the details to ensure stabilization and prevention of tension.
4. An emergency response mechanism based on real time communication, information and action will be established. Situation rooms will be established for Gaza and the West Bank manned by security officials who will maintain constant contact and cooperation.
5. Israel will deploy its forces to the locations where they were stationed prior to the recent crises.
6. Israel will deploy its forces outside of Area A. Concerns about Area B will be addressed in accordance with the Interim Agreement.
7. A mechanism for coordination between the Prime Minister and the Chairman's office will be established to deal with any potential problems or sources of tension.
8. The two leaders reiterated their agreement to the President's proposal for a meeting of security officials to be chaired by the United States for the purpose of fact-finding and to prevent a re-occurrence of the recent violence and confrontation.
9. The United States will develop with the Israelis and the Palestinians, as well as in consultation with the United Nations secretary-general, a committee of fact-finding on the events of the past several days.

24 May 2001

Notes on a meeting between Abu Ala, Martin Indyk and Terje Larsen

1. Preparations will be made for an understanding to be announced at a joint meeting with the parties from the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. The role of the parties from the Sharm el-Sheikh summit will be to endorse this understanding and not to negotiate on it.
2. As soon as such an understanding is announced, the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Prime Minister of Israel will call on both their peoples to refrain from violence of all kinds and to deal with each other in peace.
3. The parties from the Sharm el-Sheikh summit will form a monitoring committee made to observe the implementation of this understanding and all its clauses.
4. The understanding will be implemented over three phases. These are:

Phase One

Initial steps, to be implemented within 2–4 weeks. They will restore the situation to how it was before 28 September 2000. These include:

1. An end to closures.
2. The withdrawal of tanks and heavy weaponry surrounding the Palestinian territories.
3. The reopening of the Gaza airport, the Allenby crossing with Jordan and the Rafah crossing with Egypt.
4. The transfer of the revenue due to the Palestinian Authority and the implementation of other economic matters.
5. The removal of Israeli military checkpoints.
6. Israel will make a confidential undertaking to a third party to freeze all settlement activity.

Phase Two

Confidence building measures: these steps will take place over four weeks, during which time there will be meetings of all the relevant committees, including the security committees, the committee for direction and inspection, the joint economic committee, the committee for civil affairs, the legal committee, the co-operation committee and others. These meetings will continue as necessary to deal with all the problems. Some of these are:

7. Reclassifying all areas designated as B into A. Implementing the third redeployment and turning the specified areas of Area C into Area A.
8. The release of all prisoners and those arrested during the last Intifada.

Appendix 1: Documents Relevant to the Text

9. Facilitating the return of displaced people to Palestinian territories.
10. Any other points in the transitional agreement.

At this stage, the Israeli prime minister will make an unambiguous declaration of intention to freeze all settlement activity in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, not excepting so-called natural growth, until the final status negotiations are completed.

Phase Three

Negotiations that will continue over the period of a year will be conducted in two parallel tracks:

In the first of these tracks, the implementation of the transitional issues will be completed and monitored.

In the second track, negotiations on final status issues will be completed. These are: Jerusalem, refugees, land, borders, settlements, water, external relations and the achievement of a permanent peace agreement. These should be completed within the one-year period.

23 November 2001

Internal Palestinian policy document

We welcome President Bush's speech and the Quartet meeting that took place in New York in the presence of Secretary of State Colin Powell, and we also welcome Colin Powell's own speech. We will concentrate on the American call for:

1. A solution based on two states (Palestine and Israel).
2. An end to occupation.
3. A freeze on all settlement activity.
4. A solution based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords.

We renew our commitment to negotiations, considering them to be the only road to peace and the best strategic option for the Palestinian people, as decided by the National Council and the Legislative Council in the presence of President Clinton.

We are prepared to start implementing all the elements of the Tenet Plan and the Mitchell Report immediately. We seek a parallel and mutual implementation without preconditions.

We will fight terrorism in all its forms and will implement all commitments that call on us to do so.

We shall also implement our other commitments, making the maximum effort to do so.

In exchange, we expect Israel to take several steps, in particular:

5. To withdraw entirely from Area A and to refrain from entering in the future.
6. To end infiltration, assassination and the violence committed by settlers and the army.
7. To end all forms of closures and sieges of cities, including international crossings, and to refrain from undertaking such actions in the future.
8. Israeli forces to return to their pre-28 September 2000 positions.
9. The outstanding tax revenues due to the PA to be transferred, and Israel to commit to refraining from withholding revenues in the future.
10. To implement of all Israel's other commitments.

We also call for the monitoring committee to be reformed in order to implement the transitional agreements. We expect the above commitments to be implemented within four weeks.

1. At the end of the fourth week, Israel will freeze all settlement activity as recommended by the Mitchell Report.
2. After that, the two sides will carry out confidence-building measures as recommended by the Mitchell Report, including the suspended transitional commitments as outlined by the Committee for Observation and Direction.
3. A high-ranking tripartite political committee will be formed (by the United States, Palestine and Israel) to discuss resuming the final status negotiations and to end them within a year.

For all the above to succeed, there needs to be a third party to monitor and investigate with the aim of resolving conflicts which may arise between the two sides. We expect the United States to lead efforts seeking to implement this, deploying international and Arab efforts on the basis of Colin Powell's speech.

Naturally, these principles must be applied in the context of a comprehensive and detailed timetable by both sides and with American participation. The Palestinian negotiators are ready to begin discussing a timetable after this meeting.

We expect the United States to play a prominent role in guaranteeing that both sides carry out their commitments according to the timetable. Whatever may arise, we shall not allow anything to interfere with this process.

11 February 2002

The Abu Ala-Peres Document (as presented to the Israeli Labour Party in February 2002)

'Political Horizon – A Palestinian State first'

1. The Labour Party believes that the way to avert the danger that would threaten the existence of the state of Israel if it became a bi-national state, without a Jewish majority, would be to establish a demilitarised Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel.
2. The Labour Party believes that it is the moral destiny of Jewish history to abandon its control over the Palestinian people and that this would be in the political and security interests of the state of Israel.
3. These matters can only be achieved through an agreement to separate the two peoples with the complete agreement of both sides.
4. There must be agreement over shared political objectives which would enable there to be a real ceasefire as the prelude to permanent peace.
5. When the Palestinians rejected President Clinton's recommendation at Camp David, they sowed doubt in the hearts of many about the existence of a Palestinian partner in the peace process. It seems that following this state of distrust which arose as a result of the Palestinian rejection, there is a need for an additional partner that adds authenticity to the negotiations and confidence in their results. Practically, there is such a partner. The Quartet which was established at the Madrid conference (USA, EU, Russia and the UN), has said that danger is increasing in the Middle East, and that threats to use ballistic rockets which can reach beyond the geographical borders of the Middle East, the terrorism across borders and the nonconventional weapons, dictate that the quartet should intervene quickly, and to work in a united way to create a new launch for the peace process.
6. The peace plan has to suggest steps that can find acceptance by Israel and non-rejection by the Arab side. This has become possible after the proposal of the Saudi peace plan and reaching understandings with the Palestinians (Peres-Abu Ala understandings.)
7. The understandings that have been reached between us and Palestinian representatives (under the leadership of Abu Ala, the president of the Palestinian parliament), have not been approved or rejected officially. They are based on the power of logic which brings ideological points of view closer together in Israel and builds bridges between existing political rifts between us and our neighbours.
8. These understandings can be divided into four phases:
 - 8a. The first phase: this phase is conditional upon the establishment of one Palestinian security force which would end the plurality of armed factions, which allows extremist organisations to harm the peace process and which threatens Palestinian self-rule and dictates defence operations

by Israel. The existence of a unified leadership over possession and use of weapons will lead to a real ceasefire and to the recognition of a Palestinian state with the borders of 4 June 1967 first, and then the declaration of a state in Areas A, B and part of C.

8b. The second phase: mutual recognition in a short period of time (several weeks). Israel recognises Palestinian self-rule in a state whose final borders will be decided during negotiations on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the recognition of the Palestinians that Israel is a Jewish state.

8c. The third phase: beginning negotiations which would last for approximately one year to solve issues over which there are differences. These are: borders, Jerusalem, settlements and security arrangements.

8d. The fourth phase: implementing the agreements that have been reached within one more year.

27 March 2002

**President Yasser Arafat: address to the Arab League summit in Beirut,
27–28 March 2002**

Every village, town, refugee camp and city in our homeland has been isolated and besieged through a process of collective punishment and economic strangulation [...] with this, the question presents itself again: what do we want from this summit as Palestinians and Arabs? [...]

We hope that your summit will send a clear message to both Israel and to the entire world that the people of Palestine cannot be isolated or forced to give up their rights [...] we must therefore return to what was agreed in Sharm el-Sheikh and restore the situation to how it was prior to 28 September 2000, also restoring security for the benefit of our own security and for theirs and in order to implement the agreements signed under international auspices in Sharm el-Sheikh, Madrid and others.

We hope to find ways to enlist support for the steadfastness of our people according to the decisions of the Cairo summit and to correct any errors that have been made without feeling that our brethren are not with us from the first step of support to the last. Support is not only a response to primary needs under siege and collective punishment which seek to destroy the basic needs of human life and to starve the people of Palestine, it is also primarily to assure our people that their great nations will always support them and sustain them [...]

Here, I find it necessary to present to the leaders of the Arab nation, clearly and specifically, our position on the issue of terrorism and violence. [...]

We [...] reaffirm our principal and practical position which rejects absolutely terrorism in all its forms, including terrorism on the part of individuals and

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terrorism by states. The international community must reassess the practices of Israel against our Palestinian people in all their forms, including military assaults, attacks on our living conditions, the establishment of settlements on our lands, economic aggression and even the repeated attacks on our holy places, both Islamic and Christian. [...]

As for violence, here we must be very clear. [...] We have been committed to the peace conferences and agreements and to the peace of the brave. Our Palestinian people, and our Arab nation, are still committed to this peace. Colonisation and land theft, and the insistence on the Judaisation of Jerusalem, are the most dangerous forms of violence. The presence of the Israel's armed forces and settlers [...] with a free hand to strike the Palestinians and occupy and steal their land [...] represents the highest degree of violence, while [...] total closure and collective punishment are prohibited internationally.

Despite that, we are totally prepared from now, mutually and with international and Arab participation, to confront this violence, whatever its source, not with violence but through an immediate return to the negotiating table and a precise implementation of the clauses of the all signed agreements, the most recent of which was Sharm el-Sheikh, which was the outcome of the American–Egyptian–Jordanian–European–international presence and effort.

Israel has agreed to the clauses of Sharm el-Sheikh and we can see no obstacle to their immediate implementation on the ground. In addition, there are agreements between us and the Israelis which have been ratified but part of which have not been implemented. [...] He who seeks true peace [...] has no right to override agreements. [...]

International protection is a legitimate right enjoyed by our people [...] and their principal rights are [...] to return, to enjoy independence and to see the establishment of a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital. This is our position and this is our vision for the Palestinian and Arab present and future on all levels [...]’

4 December 2002

**Speech by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon at the Herzliya Conference,
Institute for Policy and Strategy**

Twenty-seven months ago the Palestinian Authority commenced a campaign of terror against the State of Israel. Since then, we have been confronting a ferocious battle against a culture of bloodshed and murder, which has targeted Jews and Israelis everywhere. This campaign of terror was not coincidental; it was meticulously planned and prepared by the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority who misconstrued the high regard for human life in Israeli society as a way to compel us to capitulate to terrorism and coerce us into additional political concessions, concession with nothing in return.

The past two years have been a difficult and painful test for Israel's national strength. The callousness and brutality of the terrorists was aimed – first and foremost – at undermining the sense of justness of the people of Zion. This is not the place to ask what led the PA Chairman to question the inner strength and determination which has always characterized the citizens of Israel, but it is clear that the terror has not defeated and will never defeat the State of Israel. They tried to break our spirit – and failed. This failure has resulted in scathing Palestinian criticism of Arafat, his path of terrorism and ongoing strategy of violence against Israel.

Today, most of the weight of the global leadership is in the United States. From the first days of the establishment of the State of Israel, our bond with the United States has been a supreme strategic asset. My Government has further consolidated our relations with the United States and formed a special closeness with the US Administration and Congress. These special relations, the understanding of Israel's needs, and the cooperation with President Bush and his administration are unprecedented. Israel has in the United States true friends who genuinely and honestly care for our security.

Our political understandings with the United States and the Administration's understanding of our security needs have provided us with the required leeway in our ongoing war on terrorism. The war on terror has been accompanied by exorbitant costs and harsh financial damage, and I hope and believe that in the coming months we will receive special aid, to support us in our economic campaign.

On June 24th this year, President Bush presented his plan for a true solution to our conflict with the Palestinians. The peace plan outlined in the President's speech is a reasonable, pragmatic and practicable one, which offers a real opportunity to achieve an agreement. We have accepted in principle the President's plan and the sequence presented therein. Our agreements with the Palestinians are based on the lessons the Americans learned from the Clinton-Barak plan, and my experience as one who has, for many years, participated in the security and political campaign in the Palestinian arena.

After concerted efforts, the US Administration has understood and agreed that the only way to achieve a true peace agreement with the Palestinians is progress in phases, with the first phase being a complete cessation of terror. President Bush's speech is a fatal blow to Arafat's policy of terrorism and serves as proof of the failure of his attempt to achieve political gains by means of violence and terrorism. Only after a cessation of terror – and this is already agreed by most world leaders – will the commencement of peace negotiations between the parties be possible.

The American plan defines the parties' progress according to phases. The transition from one phase to the next will not be on the basis of a pre-determined timetable – which would have resulted in a build-up of heavy pressure on Israel towards the end of one phase and approaching the next phase. Rather, progress

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is determined on the basis of performance – only once a specific phase has been implemented, will progress into the next phase be possible.

On the basis of lessons learned from past agreements, it is clear to all that Israel can no longer be expected to make political concessions until there is proven calm and Palestinian governmental reforms. In this context, it is important to remember that political concessions which will be made in the future – as those made in the past – are irreversible.

Even the current security reality, with the IDF operating freely inside Palestinian cities, arises from security needs and has not changed the political situation of two years ago. Israel will not re-control territories from which it withdrew as a result of political agreements. Therefore, the achievement of true and genuine coexistence must be a pre-condition to any discussion on political arrangements.

The Jewish people seek peace. Israel's desire is to live in security and in true and genuine coexistence, based, first and foremost, on the recognition of our natural and historic right to exist as a Jewish state in the land of Israel, while maintaining genuine peace.

The achievement of true coexistence must be carried out, first and foremost, by the replacement of the Palestinian leadership which has lied and disappointed, with different leadership which can – and more importantly – is willing to achieve real peace with the State of Israel. Unfortunately, there remain a few in Israel who believe that Arafat is still relevant. However, the US Administration – with the world following in its footsteps – has already accepted our unequivocal position that no progress will be possible with Arafat as the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. This man is not – and never will be – a partner to peace. He does not want peace.

The reconstruction of a Palestinian government should commence with governmental reforms which will ultimately lead to the establishment of a new, honest and peace-seeking administration, the removal of Arafat from his command of power and sources of financing, and from the decision-making process, and his relegation to a symbolic role.

In concordance with the sequence presented by President Bush, a Chief Executive Officer for Reforms will be appointed to the Palestinian Authority, and will constitute the head of the executive authority and the source of administrative authority. The provisional Palestinian government will administer a more efficient governmental system, fight the prevailing corruption in the PA and adhere to regulations of proper management. That government will lead a comprehensive process of reforms, maintain coexistence and prepare the general elections.

The elections in the Palestinian Authority should be held only at the conclusion of the reform process and after proper governmental regulations have been internalized. The goal is that these will be true elections – free, liberated and democratic.

Parallel with, and perhaps even prior to the governmental reforms, a security reform will be carried out, consisting of three principle parts:

1. Dismantling all existing security (terrorist) bodies, the majority of which are, in fact, involved in terror; these organizations, which are directly subordinate to Arafat, are essentially corrupt, and responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Israelis. These bodies will be replaced by two or three new organizations which will consist of a police force and security services; these new organizations will have a uniform command, which will be responsible for dismantling the current complex web of militias and armed gangs.
2. A Minister of the Interior will be appointed, and will be responsible for collecting illegal weapons and transferring them to a third party which will remove them from the PA territories and destroy them, and outlawing terrorist organizations.
3. In addition, cooperation on security issues between the PA and Israel will be renewed immediately.

The security reform must accompany a sincere and real effort to stop terrorism, while applying the 'chain of preventive measures' outlined by the Americans: intelligence gathering, arrest, interrogation, prosecution and punishment.

Another important matter is the international demand for honest, effective, non-corrupt and transparent administration of the PA financial system; it is of great importance that the PA manage its financial affairs in concordance with the rules of proper government which will obligate the Palestinian Authority, *inter alia*, to produce a detailed budget, under a budgetary control system. This budgetary auditing system will ensure a balance between income and expenditure, and will verify that budget spending only serves appropriate economic purposes for the benefit and welfare of the Palestinian people. Such a supervising mechanism will also prevent the transfer of money for the financing of organizations or individuals involved in terror.

Taking the financial system out of Arafat's hands, and appointing a strong Minister of Finance with authority, constitutes an important factor for stopping the terrorist system operated by the Palestinian Authority. We are hopeful that the newly appointed PA Minister of Finance will operate a body to oversee and handle foreign aid funds received by the PA, and channel those funds to clearly defined projects which will benefit the Palestinian people and which are not contaminated by terror and corruption.

Peace and coexistence cannot be achieved without reform in the fields of education, media and information; the virulent incitement mechanism instigated by the PA against Israel must be stopped immediately; there can be no peace while the Palestinian education system instils in their young generation a culture of hatred, violence and terror.

Today, there is an increasing understanding in the world that stopping the phenomenon of suicide terrorism is dependent on: the cessation of incitement,

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ending the religious ratification of terrorism by radical elements in the Muslim world – with the encouragement and support of various Arab states.

The Palestinian justice system and law-enforcement must also undergo significant reforms. It is unheard of that in a law-abiding country, one hour after being arrested for theft, a suspect is sentenced and hanged, while on the other hand those involved in terror enter and leave prison in the 'revolving door' principle. As long as those who commit crimes against the State of Israel are not severely punished, no progress will be made in President Bush's sequence.

The two sides will advance to the next phase of President Bush's sequence when a new, different, responsible and non-corrupt Palestinian leadership emerges. Terror will cease, and the Palestinian leadership will not allow it to be renewed. Civil and economic cooperation will be established. Incitement will be stopped and education towards peace will be fostered. At the same time, Israel will act to lift military pressure, create territorial continuity between Palestinian population centers, and ease daily life for the Palestinian population.

The second phase of President Bush's sequence proposes the establishment of a Palestinian state with borders yet to be finalized, and which will overlap with territories A and B, except for essential security zones. This Palestinian state will be completely demilitarized. It will be allowed to maintain lightly armed police and interior forces to ensure civil order. Israel will continue to control all entries and exits to the Palestinian state, will command its airspace, and not allow it to form alliances with Israel's enemies.

As I have promised in the past, President Bush's sequence will be discussed and approved by the National Unity Government which I intend to establish after the elections, and I will do my utmost to establish as broad a National Unity Government as possible.

In the final phase of President Bush's sequence negotiations will be opened to determine the final status of the Palestinian state and fix its permanent borders. As I emphasized, no progress will be made from one phase to the next until such time as quiet has been restored, Palestinian rule has undergone fundamental changes, and coexistence is ensured.

We all want peace. It is not a competition over who wants peace more. We also know that entering into political negotiations for peace is the true path which will bring about acceleration of economic growth and prosperity. I have said it before, and will say it again today: Israel is prepared to make painful concessions for a true peace. However, the government under my leadership will not be seduced into believing false promises which will endanger the security of the State of Israel.

My ideological and political path is well-known to you from the many functions I was privileged to fill during my decades of public service. These decisions are not easy for me, and I cannot deny that I have doubts, reservations and fears; however, I have come to the conclusion that in the present regional and international reality Israel must act with courage to

accept the political plan which I described. There are risks involved, but also enormous opportunities.

I know that there are many who will attack the political outline I have just detailed. During the last few years many of us were tempted to believe in lightning-quick solutions which would lead to the security and peace we have longed for, and that this long-lasting conflict between our two peoples could be solved by the 'blade of a sword' – I am familiar with these voices from both sides of the political spectrum.

Regrettably, this is not the way things are. These methods have failed – the solution to the conflict must be gradual and controlled. We must, in all stages, act with prudence and determination, exercise judgement, and make very sure that all commitments and agreements are implemented by both sides.

It is true that this is not a shining path which will lead us to instant, magical solutions, but I am certain that only by going forward in this direction, step by step, will we be able to achieve security for the Israeli people, and reach the peace we all yearn for.

Thank you, and happy holiday.

10 March 2003

**Basic Law amendment establishing the post of Prime Minister
(PLO Negotiations Affairs Department)**

On March 10, 2003, the Palestinian Legislative Council ('PLC') approved an amendment to the Palestinian Basic Law creating the position of a Palestinian Authority Prime Minister.

1. What is the purpose of creating the post of Prime Minister?

Creating a Prime Minister is part of the Palestinian reform process and is intended to create better governance through a division and balance of powers at the senior levels of the Palestinian Authority executive branch. The post of Prime Minister was created in response to Palestinian popular demand. Recent Palestinian public opinion polls show popular and increasing support for a Prime Minister. In August 2002, 69% of Palestinians polled supported the appointment or election of a Prime Minister. In November 2002, the level of support rose to 73%.

2. According to the proposed amendment to the Basic Law, what are the powers of the Prime Minister?

The powers of the Prime Minister have yet to be approved but, as currently set forth in the PLC amendment to the Basic Law, the most important power of the Prime Minister is to oversee the work of all public and governmental institutions, including the work of every ministry. In addition, the Cabinet under the authority of the Prime Minister (and not the President), would now

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be the executive body responsible for developing the ministerial program to be approved by the PLC. Other powers include:

- forming the Cabinet (including appointment and removal of ministers and delineation of ministerial responsibilities),
- appointing a minister to act as a deputy prime minister in the absence of the Prime Minister, and
- calling and presiding over Cabinet sessions.

3. What else does the amendment to the Basic Law provide?

Each minister (including the Prime Minister) must obtain a vote of confidence from the PLC before assuming the position. (New Article 64)

The number of ministers in addition to the Prime Minister shall be increased from a maximum of 19 to a maximum of 24. (Amendment to Article 65)

4. Who is accountable to whom?

The Prime Minister and his Cabinet must be approved by a PLC vote of confidence. The Cabinet as a whole (including the Prime Minister) reports to the PLC and can only be removed as a body by a PLC vote of no confidence. However, the Prime Minister reports to the President and may be removed by the President. Similarly, each minister reports to the Prime Minister and may only be removed by the Prime Minister (or a PLC vote of no confidence in such minister).

5. Who is responsible for security?

Internal security and public order (including preventive security, civil defense and police forces) are a Cabinet function (currently under the Ministry of Interior) and therefore, ultimately under the authority of the Prime Minister. Responsibility over national security resides with the President.

6. Who is responsible for negotiations with Israel?

The appointment of the Prime Minister does not directly relate to negotiations with Israel because the Prime Minister is a position within the Palestinian Authority, whereas negotiations with Israel are conducted by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Negotiations with Israel are led by the PLO's Negotiations Affairs Department, headed by Mahmoud Abbas, operating under the authority of PLO Chairman Arafat.

6A. So what is the difference between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)?

The Palestinian Authority is a temporary administrative body (intended only to serve during the interim period prior to the establishment of a

Palestinian state) established by the Oslo Accords in 1994 to govern those areas of Occupied Palestinian Territories from which Israeli occupation forces withdraw (currently 17.2% of the Occupied West Bank and approximately 80% of the Occupied Gaza Strip). Yasir Arafat was democratically elected President of the Palestinian Authority on January 20, 1996. To date, Mahmoud Abbas has not held a position within the Palestinian Authority.

The Palestine Liberation Organization, established in 1964, is the Palestinian government in exile and carries out the state functions of the Palestinian people, including negotiations with Israel. As part of the Oslo Accords, the government of Israel 'decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and to commence negotiations with the PLO [...]'. Yasir Arafat is the Chairman of the PLO. Mahmoud Abbas is Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee and heads the PLO's Negotiations Affairs Department.

7. What is the process by which the post of Prime Minister will be finalized?

At the beginning of a PLC meeting on March 10, 2003, President Arafat nominated Mahmoud Abbas as Prime Minister.

The PLC then voted (64–3, 4 abstentions) in favor of creating the post of Prime Minister, a post which did not exist in the Palestinian Basic Law.

Later at the same meeting, the PLC adopted an amendment to the Palestinian Basic Law creating the position of Prime Minister and defining its powers. The draft amendment originated from the PLC Legal Committee.

The amendment was presented to President Arafat for approval on March 11, 2003.

The President has 30 days to (i) sign and publish the amendment in the official gazette, thereby making the amendment law or (ii) send the amendment back to the PLC with comments and the PLC will then debate the amendment in light of the President's comments and may override the President's comments by a two-thirds majority vote.

In the event of the President's approval of the amendment and Abbas' acceptance of the post, Abbas will have three weeks (with a possible two week extension) to submit his cabinet and its program to the PLC for a vote of confidence.

Abbas has stated that he will not formally accept the position of Prime Minister prior to an agreement on the position's powers.

14 April 2004

Exchange of letters between Ariel Sharon and George W. Bush

1) Letter from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to US President George W. Bush

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House, Washington, DC

Dear Mr President,

The vision that you articulated in your 24 June 2002 address constitutes one of the most significant contributions toward ensuring a bright future for the Middle East. Accordingly, the State of Israel has accepted the Roadmap, as adopted by our government. For the first time, a practical and just formula was presented for the achievement of peace, opening a genuine window of opportunity for progress toward a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, involving two states living side-by-side in peace and security.

This formula sets forth the correct sequence and principles for the attainment of peace. Its full implementation represents the sole means to make genuine progress. As you have stated, a Palestinian state will never be created by terror, and Palestinians must engage in a sustained fight against the terrorists and dismantle their infrastructure. Moreover, there must be serious efforts to institute true reform and real democracy and liberty, including new leaders not compromised by terror. We are committed to this formula as the only avenue through which an agreement can be reached. We believe that this formula is the only viable one.

The Palestinian Authority under its current leadership has taken no action to meet its responsibilities under the Roadmap. Terror has not ceased, reform of the Palestinian security services has not been undertaken, and real institutional reforms have not taken place. The State of Israel continues to pay the heavy cost of constant terror. Israel must preserve its capability to protect itself and deter its enemies, and we thus retain our right to defend ourselves against terrorism and to take actions against terrorist organizations.

Having reached the conclusion that, for the time being, there exists no Palestinian partner with whom to advance peacefully toward a settlement and since the current impasse is unhelpful to the achievement of our shared goals, I have decided to initiate a process of gradual disengagement with the hope of reducing friction between Israelis and Palestinians. The Disengagement Plan is designed to improve security for Israel and stabilize our political and economic situation. It will enable us to deploy our forces more effectively until such time that conditions in the Palestinian Authority allow for the full implementation of the Roadmap to resume.

I attach, for your review, the main principles of the Disengagement Plan. This initiative, which we are not undertaking under the roadmap, represents an independent Israeli plan, yet is not inconsistent with the roadmap. According to this plan, the State of Israel intends to relocate military installations and all

Israeli villages and towns in the Gaza Strip, as well as other military installations and a small number of villages in Samaria.

In this context, we also plan to accelerate construction of the Security Fence, whose completion is essential in order to ensure the security of the citizens of Israel. The fence is a security rather than political barrier, temporary rather than permanent, and therefore will not prejudice any final status issues including final borders. The route of the Fence, as approved by our Government's decisions, will take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

Upon my return from Washington, I expect to submit this Plan for the approval of the Cabinet and the Knesset, and I firmly believe that it will win such approval.

The Disengagement Plan will create a new and better reality for the State of Israel, enhance its security and economy, and strengthen the fortitude of its people. In this context, I believe it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. Additionally, the Plan will entail a series of measures with the inherent potential to improve the lot of the Palestinian Authority, providing that it demonstrates the wisdom to take advantage of this opportunity. The execution of the Disengagement Plan holds the prospect of stimulating positive changes within the Palestinian Authority that might create the necessary conditions for the resumption of direct negotiations.

We view the achievement of a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians as our central focus and are committed to realizing this objective. Progress toward this goal must be anchored exclusively in the Roadmap and we will oppose any other plan.

In this regard, we are fully aware of the responsibilities facing the State of Israel. These include limitations on the growth of settlements; removal of unauthorized outposts; and steps to increase, to the extent permitted by security needs, freedom of movement for Palestinians not engaged in terrorism. Under separate cover we are sending to you a full description of the steps the State of Israel is taking to meet all its responsibilities.

The government of Israel supports the United States efforts to reform the Palestinian security services to meet their roadmap obligations to fight terror. Israel also supports the American's efforts, working with the International Community, to promote the reform process, build institutions and improve the economy of the Palestinian Authority and to enhance the welfare of its people, in the hope that a new Palestinian leadership will prove able to fulfil its obligations under the roadmap.

I want to again express my appreciation for your courageous leadership in the war against global terror, your important initiative to revitalize the Middle East as a more fitting home for its people and, primarily, your personal friendship and profound support for the State of Israel.

Sincerely,
Ariel Sharon

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2) Letter from US President George W. Bush to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

His Excellency Ariel Sharon
Prime Minister of Israel

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

Thank you for your letter setting out your disengagement plan.

The United States remains hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian dispute. I remain committed to my June 24, 2002 vision of two states living side by side in peace and security as the key to peace, and to the roadmap as the route to get there.

We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace. We also understand that, in this context, Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. We are hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with my vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.

The United States appreciates the risks such an undertaking represents. I therefore want to reassure you on several points.

First, the United States remains committed to my vision and to its implementation as described in the roadmap. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan. Under the roadmap, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Second, there will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.

Third, Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. The United States will lead efforts, working together with Jordan, Egypt, and others in the international

Peace Negotiations in Palestine

community, to build the capacity and will of Palestinian institutions to fight terrorism, dismantle terrorist organizations, and prevent the areas from which Israel has withdrawn from posing a threat that would have to be addressed by any other means. The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

I know that, as you state in your letter, you are aware that certain responsibilities face the State of Israel. Among these, your government has stated that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

As you know, the United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with my vision set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the roadmap. The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civic institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations.

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, the United States believes that all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups

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engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Mr Prime Minister, you have described a bold and historic initiative that can make an important contribution to peace. I commend your efforts and your courageous decision which I support. As a close friend and ally, the United States intends to work closely with you to help make it a success.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

3 May 2004

[Sharon's disengagement plan: full text](#)

KEY PRINCIPLES

Overview

Israel is committed to the peace process, and aspires to reach a mutual agreement on the basis of two states for two peoples, the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, as part of the realization of US President George W. Bush's vision.

Israel believes that it must act to improve the current reality. Israel has come to the conclusion that at present, there is no Palestinian partner with whom it is possible to make progress on a bilateral agreement. In light of this, a unilateral disengagement plan has been formulated, which is based on the following considerations:

- A. The stagnation inherent in the current situation is harmful. In order to emerge from this stagnation, Israel must initiate a move that will not be contingent on Palestinian cooperation.
- B. The plan will lead to a better security reality, at least in the long term.
- C. In any future final-status agreement, there will be no Israeli settlement in the Gaza Strip. However, it is clear that in Judea and Samaria, some areas will remain part of the state of Israel, among them civilian settlements, military zones and places where Israel has additional interests.
- D. The exit from the Gaza Strip and from the area of northern Samaria (four settlements and military installations in their environs) will reduce friction with the Palestinian population and has the potential to improve the fabric of Palestinian life and the Palestinian economy.
- E. Israel hopes that the Palestinians will have the sense to take advantage of the disengagement move in order to exit the cycle of violence and rejoin the process of dialogue.
- F. The disengagement move will obviate the claims about Israel with regard to its responsibility for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

G. The disengagement move does not detract from the existing agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. The existing arrangements will continue to prevail.

When there is evidence on the Palestinian side of the willingness, ability and actual realization of a fight against terror and of the implementation of the reforms stipulated in the roadmap, it will be possible to return to the track of negotiations and dialogue.

MAIN POINTS OF THE PLAN

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all the Israeli settlements currently existing there, and will redeploy outside the territory of the Strip. This, apart from military deployment along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, will be detailed below.
2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent Israeli civilian or military presence in the areas that are evacuated in the continental expanse of the Gaza Strip will remain. As a result, there will be no basis for the claim that the Gaza Strip is occupied territory.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Israel will evacuate the area of northern Samaria (Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur) and all the permanent military installations in this area, and will redeploy outside the evacuated area.
2. Upon completion of the move, no permanent presence of Israeli military forces and Israeli civilians in the area of northern Samaria will remain.
3. The move will enable Palestinian territorial contiguity in the area of northern Samaria.
4. Israel will improve the transportation infrastructure in Judea and Samaria with the aim of enabling Palestinian transportation contiguity in Judea and Samaria.
5. The move will make Palestinian economic and commercial activity easier in Judea and Samaria.

C. The security fence

Israel will continue to build the security fence, in accordance with the relevant government decisions. The route will take humanitarian considerations into account.

SECURITY REALITY AFTER THE EVACUATION

A. The Gaza Strip

1. Israel will supervise and guard the external envelope of land, will maintain exclusive control in the air space of Gaza, and will continue to conduct military activities in the sea space of the Gaza Strip.

Appendix 1: Documents Relevant to the Text

2. The Gaza Strip will be demilitarized and devoid of armaments, the presence of which is not in accordance with the existing agreements between the sides.
3. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defence, including taking preventative steps as well as responding by using force against threats that will emerge from the Gaza Strip.

B. Judea and Samaria

1. Upon evacuation of the settlements from northern Samaria (Ganim, Kadim, Homesh and Sa-Nur), no permanent military presence will remain in their environs.
2. Israel reserves for itself the basic right of self-defence, including taking of preventative steps as well as responding with force against threats that emerge from this area.
3. In the rest of the Judea and Samaria territories, existing security activity will continue. However, in accordance with the circumstances, Israel will consider reducing its activity in Palestinian cities.
4. Israel will work toward reducing the number of checkpoints in Judea and Samaria as a whole.

MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE GAZA STRIP AND THE NORTHERN SAMARIA AREA

In general, they will be dismantled and evacuated, except for those that Israel will decide to leave in place and transfer to a body that will be determined.

THE NATURE OF MILITARY AID TO THE PALESTINIANS

Israel agrees that, in coordination with it, advice, aid and instruction will be given to Palestinian security forces for the purpose of fighting terror and maintaining public order by American, British, Egyptian, Jordanian or other experts, as will be agreed upon by Israel.

Israel insists that there will be no foreign security presence in the Gaza Strip or Judea and Samaria that is not in coordination with Israel and with Israel's agreement.

THE BORDER AREA BETWEEN THE GAZA STRIP AND EGYPT

During the first stage, Israel will continue to maintain a military presence along the border line between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. This presence is an essential security need, and in certain places, it is possible that there will be a need for the physical enlargement of the area in which the military activity will be carried out.

Later on, the possibility of evacuating this area will be considered. The evacuation of this area will be contingent on, among other things, the security reality and the extent of Egypt's cooperation in the creation of a more reliable arrangement.

If and when conditions emerge for the evacuation of this area, Israel will be prepared to examine the possibility of establishing a sea port and an airport in the Gaza Strip, subject to arrangements that will be determined with Israel.

THE ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS

Israel will aspire to leave standing the real estate assets of the Israeli settlements.

The transfer of Israeli economic activities to Palestinian use embodies within it a possibility for the expansion of Palestinian economic activity.

Israel proposes that an international body be established, to be agreed upon by the United States and Israel, which will receive possession from Israel of the settlements that remain and will appraise the value of all the assets.

Israel reserves for itself the right to ask for consideration of the economic value of the assets that will be left in the evacuated area.

INFRASTRUCTURES AND CIVILIAN ARRANGEMENTS

The water, electricity, sewage and communications infrastructures that serve the Palestinians will be left in place.

Israel will aspire to leave in place the water, electricity and sewage infrastructures that serve the Israeli settlements that will be evacuated.

As a rule, Israel will enable the continued supply of electricity, water, gas and fuel to the Palestinians, under the existing arrangements.

The existing arrangements, including the arrangements with regard to water and the electro-magnetic area, will remain valid.

THE ACTIVITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVILIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Israel views very favourably continued activity of the international humanitarian organizations and those that deal with civil development which aid the Palestinian population.

Israel will coordinate with the international organizations the arrangements that will make this activity easier.

THE ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS

In general, the economic arrangements that are currently in effect between Israel and the Palestinians will remain valid. These arrangements include, among other things:

- A. The entry of workers into Israel in accordance with the existing criteria.
- B. The movement of goods between the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Israel and foreign countries.
- C. The monetary regime.
- D. The taxation arrangements and the customs envelope.
- E. Postal and communications arrangements.

Appendix 1: Documents Relevant to the Text

THE EREZ INDUSTRIAL ZONE

The Erez Industrial Zone, which is located inside the Gaza Strip, employs approximately 4,000 Palestinian workers. The continued activity of the industrial zone is, above all, a definite Palestinian interest.

Israel will consider leaving the industrial zone in its current format under two conditions:

- A. The maintenance of appropriate security arrangements.
- B. An explicit recognition by the international community that the continued existence of the industrial zone in its current format will not be perceived as a continuation of Israeli control in the area.

Alternatively, the industrial zone will be transferred to the responsibility of an agreed-upon Palestinian or international element.

Israel will examine, together with Egypt, the possibility of establishing a joint industrial zone on the border of the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Israel.

THE INTERNATIONAL CROSSING POINTS

- A. The international crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Egypt:
 - 1. The existing arrangements will remain in force.
 - 2. Israel is interested in transferring the crossing point to the 'border triangle', about 2km south of its current location; this will be done in coordination with the Egyptians. This will allow the expansion of the hours of activity at the crossing point.
- B. The international crossing points between Judea and Samaria, and Jordan:
The existing arrangements will remain in force.

THE EREZ CROSSING POINT

The Erez crossing point will be moved into the territory of the State of Israel according to a timetable that will be determined separately.

TIMETABLE

The evacuation process is planned for completion by the end of 2005.

The stages of the evacuation and the detailed timetable will be made known to the Americans.

SUMMARY

Israel expects broad international support for the disengagement move. This support is essential in order to bring the Palestinians to actually implement what is incumbent upon them in the areas of fighting terror and carrying out reforms according to the roadmap, at which time the sides will be able to return to negotiations.

17 March 2005

The Cairo Declaration

1. Those gathered confirmed their adherence to Palestinian principles, without any neglect, and the right of the Palestinian people to resistance in order to end the occupation, establish a Palestinian state with full sovereignty with Jerusalem as its capital, and the guaranteeing of the right of return of refugees to their homes and property.
2. Those gathered agreed on a programme for the year 2005, centred on the continuation of the atmosphere of calm in return for Israel's adherence to stopping all forms of aggression against our land and our Palestinian people, no matter where they are, as well as the release of all prisoners and detainees.
3. Those gathered confirmed that the continuation of settlement and the construction of the wall and the Judaisation of East Jerusalem are explosive issues.
4. Those gathered explored the internal Palestinian situation and agreed on the necessity of completing total reform in all areas, of supporting the democratic process in its various aspects and of holding local and legislative elections at their determined time according to an election law to be agreed upon. The conference recommends to the Legislative Council that it take steps to amend the legislative elections law, relying on an equal division (of seats) in a mixed system, and it recommends that the law for elections of local councils be amended on the basis of proportional representation.
5. Those gathered agreed to develop the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on bases that will be settled upon in order to include all the Palestinian powers and factions, as the organisation is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. To do this, it has been agreed upon to form a committee to define these bases, and the committee will be made up of the president of the National Council, the members of the PLO's Executive Committee, the secretaries general of all Palestinian factions and independent national personalities. The president of the executive committee will convene this committee.
6. Those gathered felt unanimously that dialogue is the sole means of interaction among all the factions, as a support to national unity and the unity of the Palestinian ranks. They were unanimous in forbidding the use of weapons in internal disputes, respecting the rights of the Palestinian citizen and refraining from violating them, and that continuing dialogue through the coming period is a basic necessity towards unifying our speech and preserving Palestinian rights.

APPENDIX 2

The Mitchell Report

Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-finding Committee Report
April 30 2001

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr President,

We enclose herewith the report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee.

We sought and received information and advice from a wide range of individuals, organizations, and governments. However, the conclusions and recommendations are ours alone.

We are grateful for the support that you and your administration have provided to the Committee.

Respectfully,
Suleyman Demirel
Thorbjoern Jagland
Warren B. Rudman
Javier Solana
George J. Mitchell, Chairman

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of Israel (GOI) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) must act swiftly and decisively to halt the violence. Their immediate objectives then should be to rebuild confidence and resume negotiations.

During this mission our aim has been to fulfill the mandate agreed at Sharm el-Sheikh. We value the support given our work by the participants at the summit, and we commend the parties for their cooperation. Our principal recommendation is that they recommit themselves to the Sharm el-Sheikh spirit and that they implement the decisions made there in 1999 and 2000. We believe that the summit participants will support bold action by the parties to achieve these objectives.

The restoration of trust is essential, and the parties should take affirmative steps to this end. Given the high level of hostility and mistrust, the timing and sequence of these steps are obviously crucial. This can be decided only by the parties. We urge them to begin the process of decision immediately.

Accordingly, we recommend that steps be taken to:

END THE VIOLENCE

- The GOI and the PA should reaffirm their commitment to existing agreements and undertakings and should immediately implement an unconditional cessation of violence.
- The GOI and PA should immediately resume security cooperation.

REBUILD CONFIDENCE

- The PA and GOI should work together to establish a meaningful 'cooling off period' and implement additional confidence building measures, some of which were detailed in the October 2009 Sharm el-Sheikh Statement and some of which were offered by the US on January 7, 2001 in Cairo (see Recommendations section for further description).
- The PA and GOI should resume their efforts to identify, condemn and discourage incitement in all its forms.
- The PA should make clear through concrete action to Palestinians and Israelis alike that terrorism is reprehensible and unacceptable, and that the PA will make a 100 percent effort to prevent terrorist operations and to punish perpetrators. This effort should include immediate steps to apprehend and incarcerate terrorists operating within the PA's jurisdiction.
- The GOI should freeze all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of existing settlements.
- The GOI should ensure that the IDF adopt and enforce policies and procedures encouraging non-lethal responses to unarmed demonstrators, with a view to minimizing casualties and friction between the two communities.
- The PA should prevent gunmen from using Palestinian populated areas to fire upon Israeli populated areas and IDF positions. This tactic places civilians on both sides at unnecessary risk.

Appendix 2: The Mitchell Report

- The GOI should lift closures, transfer to the PA all tax revenues owed, and permit Palestinians who had been employed in Israel to return to their jobs; and should ensure that security forces and settlers refrain from the destruction of homes and roads, as well as trees and other agricultural property in Palestinian areas. We acknowledge the GOI's position that actions of this nature have been taken for security reasons. Nevertheless, the economic effects will persist for years.
- The PA should renew cooperation with Israeli security agencies to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that Palestinian workers employed within Israel are fully vetted and free of connections to organizations and individuals engaged in terrorism.
- The PA and GOI should consider a joint undertaking to preserve and protect holy places sacred to the traditions of Jews, Muslims, and Christians.
- The GOI and PA should jointly endorse and support the work of Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations involved in cross-community initiatives linking the two peoples.

RESUME NEGOTIATIONS

In the spirit of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and understandings of 1999 and 2000, we recommend that the parties meet to reaffirm their commitment to signed agreements and mutual understandings, and take corresponding action. This should be the basis for resuming full and meaningful negotiations.

INTRODUCTION

On October 17, 2000, at the conclusion of the Middle East Peace Summit at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, the President of the United States spoke on behalf of the participants (the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, the Governments of Egypt, Jordan, and the United States, the United Nations, and the European Union). Among other things, the President stated that:

The United States will develop with the Israelis and Palestinians, as well as in consultation with the United Nations Secretary General, a committee of fact-finding on the events of the past several weeks and how to prevent their recurrence. The committee's report will be shared by the US President with the UN Secretary General and the parties prior to publication. A final report shall be submitted under the auspices of the US President for publication.

On November 7, 2000, following consultations with the other participants, the President asked us to serve on what has come to be known as the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee. In a letter to us on December 6, 2000, the President stated that:

The purpose of the Summit, and of the agreement that ensued, was to end the violence, to prevent its recurrence, and to find a path back to the peace process. In its actions and mode of operation, therefore, the Committee should be guided by these overriding goals [...] The Committee should

strive to steer clear of any step that will intensify mutual blame and finger-pointing between the parties. As I noted in my previous letter, 'the Committee should not become a divisive force or a focal point for blame and recrimination but rather should serve to forestall violence and confrontation and provide lessons for the future.' This should not be a tribunal whose purpose is to determine the guilt or innocence of individuals or of the parties; rather, it should be a fact-finding committee whose purpose is to determine what happened and how to avoid it recurring in the future.

After our first meeting, held before we visited the region, we urged an end to all violence. Our meetings and our observations during our subsequent visits to the region have intensified our convictions in this regard. Whatever the source, violence will not solve the problems of the region. It will only make them worse. Death and destruction will not bring peace, but will deepen the hatred and harden the resolve on both sides. There is only one way to peace, justice, and security in the Middle East, and that is through negotiation.

Despite their long history and close proximity, some Israelis and Palestinians seem not to fully appreciate each other's problems and concerns. Some Israelis appear not to comprehend the humiliation and frustration that Palestinians must endure every day as a result of living with the continuing effects of occupation, sustained by the presence of Israeli military forces and settlements in their midst, or the determination of the Palestinians to achieve independence and genuine self-determination. Some Palestinians appear not to comprehend the extent to which terrorism creates fear among the Israeli people and undermines their belief in the possibility of co-existence, or the determination of the GOI to do whatever is necessary to protect its people.

Fear, hate, anger, and frustration have risen on both sides. The greatest danger of all is that the culture of peace, nurtured over the previous decade, is being shattered. In its place there is a growing sense of futility and despair, and a growing resort to violence.

Political leaders on both sides must act and speak decisively to reverse these dangerous trends; they must rekindle the desire and the drive for peace. That will be difficult. But it can be done and it must be done, for the alternative is unacceptable and should be unthinkable.

Two proud peoples share a land and a destiny. Their competing claims and religious differences have led to a grinding, demoralizing, dehumanizing conflict. They can continue in conflict or they can negotiate to find a way to live side-by-side in peace.

There is a record of achievement. In 1991 the first peace conference with Israelis and Palestinians took place in Madrid to achieve peace based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. In 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel met in Oslo for the first face-to-face negotiations; they led to mutual recognition and the Declaration of Principles (signed by

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the parties in Washington, D.C. on September 13, 1993), which provided a roadmap to reach the destination agreed in Madrid. Since then, important steps have been taken in Cairo, in Washington, and elsewhere. Last year the parties came very close to a permanent settlement.

So much has been achieved. So much is at risk. If the parties are to succeed in completing their journey to their common destination, agreed commitments must be implemented, international law respected, and human rights protected. We encourage them to return to negotiations, however difficult. It is the only path to peace, justice and security.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from their statements that the participants in the summit of last October hoped and intended that the outbreak of violence, then less than a month old, would soon end. The US President's letters to us, asking that we make recommendations on how to prevent a recurrence of violence, reflect that intention.

Yet the violence has not ended. It has worsened. Thus the overriding concern of those in the region with whom we spoke is to end the violence and to return to the process of shaping a sustainable peace. That is what we were told, and were asked to address, by Israelis and Palestinians alike. It was the message conveyed to us as well by President Mubarak of Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan, and UN Secretary General Annan.

Their concern must be ours. If our report is to have effect, it must deal with the situation that exists, which is different from that envisaged by the summit participants. In this report, we will try to answer the questions assigned to us by the Sharm el-Sheikh summit: What happened? Why did it happen?

In light of the current situation, however, we must elaborate on the third part of our mandate: How can the recurrence of violence be prevented? The relevance and impact of our work, in the end, will be measured by the recommendations we make concerning the following:

- Ending the Violence.
- Rebuilding Confidence.
- Resuming Negotiations.

WHAT HAPPENED?

We are not a tribunal. We complied with the request that we not determine the guilt or innocence of individuals or of the parties. We did not have the power to compel the testimony of witnesses or the production of documents. Most of the information we received came from the parties and, understandably, it largely tended to support their arguments.

In this part of our report, we do not attempt to chronicle all of the events from late September 2000 onward. Rather, we discuss only those that shed light on the underlying causes of violence.

In late September 2000, Israeli, Palestinian, and other officials received reports that Member of the Knesset (later Prime Minister) Ariel Sharon was planning a visit to the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Palestinian and US officials urged then Prime Minister Ehud Barak to prohibit the visit. Mr Barak told us that he believed the visit was intended to be an internal political act directed against him by a political opponent, and he declined to prohibit it.

Mr Sharon made the visit on September 28 accompanied by over 1,000 Israeli police officers. Although Israelis viewed the visit in an internal political context, Palestinians saw it as highly provocative to them. On the following day, in the same place, a large number of unarmed Palestinian demonstrators and a large Israeli police contingent confronted each other. According to the US Department of State, 'Palestinians held large demonstrations and threw stones at police in the vicinity of the Western Wall. Police used rubber-coated metal bullets and live ammunition to disperse the demonstrators, killing 4 persons and injuring about 200.' According to the GOI, 14 Israeli policemen were injured.

Similar demonstrations took place over the following several days. Thus began what has become known as the 'Al-Aqsa Intifada' (Al-Aqsa being a mosque at the Haram al-Sharif).

The GOI asserts that the immediate catalyst for the violence was the breakdown of the Camp David negotiations on July 25, 2000 and the 'widespread appreciation in the international community of Palestinian responsibility for the impasse.' In this view, Palestinian violence was planned by the PA leadership, and was aimed at 'provoking and incurring Palestinian casualties as a means of regaining the diplomatic initiative.'

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) denies the allegation that the intifada was planned. It claims, however, that 'Camp David represented nothing less than an attempt by Israel to extend the force it exercises on the ground to negotiations,' and that 'the failure of the summit, and the attempts to allocate blame on the Palestinian side only added to the tension on the ground [...]'

From the perspective of the PLO, Israel responded to the disturbances with excessive and illegal use of deadly force against demonstrators; behaviour which, in the PLO's view, reflected Israel's contempt for the lives and safety of Palestinians. For Palestinians, the widely seen images of the killing of 12-year-old Muhammad al Durra in Gaza on September 30, shot as he huddled behind his father, reinforced that perception.

From the perspective of the GOI, the demonstrations were organized and directed by the Palestinian leadership to create sympathy for their cause around the world by provoking Israeli security forces to fire upon demonstrators, especially young people. For Israelis, the lynching of two military reservists, First Sgt. Vadim Novesche and First Cpl. Yosef Avrahami, in Ramallah on October 12, reflected a deep-seated Palestinian hatred of Israel and Jews.

What began as a series of confrontations between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli security forces, which resulted in the GOI's initial restrictions on the

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movement of people and goods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (closures), has since evolved into a wider array of violent actions and responses. There have been exchanges of fire between built-up areas, sniping incidents and clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. There have also been terrorist acts and Israeli reactions thereto (characterized by the GOI as counter-terrorism), including killings, further destruction of property and economic measures. Most recently, there have been mortar attacks on Israeli locations and IDF ground incursions into Palestinian areas.

From the Palestinian perspective, the decision of Israel to characterize the current crisis as 'an armed conflict short of war' is simply a means 'to justify its assassination policy, its collective punishment policy, and its use of lethal force.' From the Israeli perspective, 'The Palestinian leadership have instigated, orchestrated and directed the violence. It has used, and continues to use, terror and attrition as strategic tools.'

In their submissions, the parties traded allegations about the motivation and degree of control exercised by the other. However, we were provided with no persuasive evidence that the Sharon visit was anything other than an internal political act; neither were we provided with persuasive evidence that the PA planned the uprising.

Accordingly, we have no basis on which to conclude that there was a deliberate plan by the PA to initiate a campaign of violence at the first opportunity; or to conclude that there was a deliberate plan by the GOI to respond with lethal force.

However, there is also no evidence on which to conclude that the PA made a consistent effort to contain the demonstrations and control the violence once it began; or that the GOI made a consistent effort to use non-lethal means to control demonstrations of unarmed Palestinians. Amid rising anger, fear, and mistrust, each side assumed the worst about the other and acted accordingly.

The Sharon visit did not cause the 'Al-Aqsa Intifada.' But it was poorly timed and the provocative effect should have been foreseen; indeed it was foreseen by those who urged that the visit be prohibited. More significant were the events that followed: the decision of the Israeli police on September 29 to use lethal means against the Palestinian demonstrators; and the subsequent failure, as noted above, of either party to exercise restraint.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

The roots of the current violence extend much deeper than an inconclusive summit conference. Both sides have made clear a profound disillusionment with the behavior of the other in failing to meet the expectations arising from the peace process launched in Madrid in 1991 and then in Oslo in 1993. Each side has accused the other of violating specific undertakings and undermining the spirit of their commitment to resolving their political differences peacefully.

Divergent Expectations: We are struck by the divergent expectations expressed

by the parties relating to the implementation of the Oslo process. Results achieved from this process were unthinkable less than 10 years ago. During the latest round of negotiations, the parties were closer to a permanent settlement than ever before.

Nonetheless, Palestinians and Israelis alike told us that the premise on which the Oslo process is based – that tackling the hard 'permanent status' issues be deferred to the end of the process – has gradually come under serious pressure. The step-by-step process agreed to by the parties was based on the assumption that each step in the negotiating process would lead to enhanced trust and confidence. To achieve this, each party would have to implement agreed upon commitments and abstain from actions that would be seen by the other as attempts to abuse the process in order to predetermine the shape of the final outcome. If this requirement is not met, the Oslo road map cannot successfully lead to its agreed destination. Today, each side blames the other for having ignored this fundamental aspect, resulting in a crisis in confidence. This problem became even more pressing with the opening of permanent status talks.

The GOI has placed primacy on moving toward a Permanent Status Agreement in a nonviolent atmosphere, consistent with commitments contained in the agreements between the parties. 'Even if slower than was initially envisaged, there has, since the start of the peace process in Madrid in 1991, been steady progress towards the goal of a Permanent Status Agreement without the resort to violence on a scale that has characterized recent weeks.' The 'goal' is the Permanent Status Agreement, the terms of which must be negotiated by the parties.

The PLO view is that delays in the process have been the result of an Israeli attempt to prolong and solidify the occupation. Palestinians 'believed that the Oslo process would yield an end to Israeli occupation in five years,' the timeframe for the transitional period specified in the Declaration of Principles. Instead there have been, in the PLO's view, repeated Israeli delays culminating in the Camp David summit, where, 'Israel proposed to annex about 11.2% of the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) [...]' and offered unacceptable proposals concerning Jerusalem, security and refugees. 'In sum, Israel's proposals at Camp David provided for Israel's annexation of the best Palestinian lands, the perpetuation of Israeli control over East Jerusalem, a continued Israeli military presence on Palestinian territory, Israeli control over Palestinian natural resources, airspace and borders, and the return of fewer than 1% of refugees to their homes.'

Both sides see the lack of full compliance with agreements reached since the opening of the peace process as evidence of a lack of good faith. This conclusion led to an erosion of trust even before the permanent status negotiations began. Divergent Perspectives: During the last seven months, these views have hardened into divergent realities. Each side views the other as having acted in bad faith; as having turned the optimism of Oslo into the suffering and grief of victims

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and their loved ones. In their statements and actions, each side demonstrates a perspective that fails to recognize any truth in the perspective of the other.

The Palestinian Perspective: For the Palestinian side, 'Madrid' and 'Oslo' heralded the prospect of a State, and guaranteed an end to the occupation and a resolution of outstanding matters within an agreed time frame. Palestinians are genuinely angry at the continued growth of settlements and at their daily experiences of humiliation and disruption as a result of Israel's presence in the Palestinian territories. Palestinians see settlers and settlements in their midst not only as violating the spirit of the Oslo process, but also as an application of force in the form of Israel's overwhelming military superiority, which sustains and protects the settlements.

The Interim Agreement provides that 'the two parties view the West Bank and Gaza as a single territorial unit, the integrity and status of which will be preserved during the interim period.' Coupled with this, the Interim Agreement's prohibition on taking steps which may prejudice permanent status negotiations denies Israel the right to continue its illegal expansionist settlement policy. In addition to the Interim Agreement, customary international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, prohibits Israel (as an occupying power) from establishing settlements in occupied territory pending an end to the conflict.

The PLO alleges that Israeli political leaders 'have made no secret of the fact that the Israeli interpretation of Oslo was designed to segregate the Palestinians in non-contiguous enclaves, surrounded by Israeli military-controlled borders, with settlements and settlement roads violating the territories' integrity.' According to the PLO, 'In the seven years since the [Declaration of Principles], the settler population in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, has doubled to 200,000, and the settler population in East Jerusalem has risen to 170,000. Israel has constructed approximately 30 new settlements, and expanded a number of existing ones to house these new settlers.'

The PLO also claims that the GOI has failed to comply with other commitments such as the further withdrawal from the West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners. In addition, Palestinians expressed frustration with the impasse over refugees and the deteriorating economic circumstances in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israeli Perspective: From the GOI perspective, the expansion of settlement activity and the taking of measures to facilitate the convenience and safety of settlers do not prejudice the outcome of permanent status negotiations.

Israel understands that the Palestinian side objects to the settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Without prejudice to the formal status of the settlements, Israel accepts that the settlements are an outstanding issue on which there will have to be agreement as part of any permanent status resolution between the sides. This point was acknowledged and agreed upon in the Declaration of Principles of 13 September 1993 as well as in other agreements between the two sides. There has in fact been a good deal of discussion on the

question of settlements between the two sides in the various negotiations toward a permanent status agreement.

Indeed, Israelis point out that at the Camp David summit and during subsequent talks the GOI offered to make significant concessions with respect to settlements in the context of an overall agreement.

Security, however, is the key GOI concern. The GOI maintains that the PLO has breached its solemn commitments by continuing the use of violence in the pursuit of political objectives. 'Israel's principal concern in the peace process has been security. This issue is of overriding importance [...] Security is not something on which Israel will bargain or compromise. The failure of the Palestinian side to comply with both the letter and spirit of the security provisions in the various agreements has long been a source of disturbance in Israel.'

According to the GOI, the Palestinian failure takes several forms: institutionalized anti-Israel, anti-Jewish incitement; the release from detention of terrorists; the failure to control illegal weapons; and the actual conduct of violent operations, ranging from the insertion of riflemen into demonstrations to terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians. The GOI maintains that the PLO has explicitly violated its renunciation of terrorism and other acts of violence, thereby significantly eroding trust between the parties. The GOI perceives 'a thread, implied but nonetheless clear, that runs throughout the Palestinian submissions. It is that Palestinian violence against Israel and Israelis is somehow explicable, understandable, legitimate.'

END THE VIOLENCE

For Israelis and Palestinians alike the experience of the past several months has been intensely personal. Through relationships of kinship, friendship, religion, community and profession, virtually everyone in both societies has a link to someone who has been killed or seriously injured in the recent violence. We were touched by their stories. During our last visit to the region, we met with the families of Palestinian and Israeli victims. These individual accounts of grief were heart-rending and indescribably sad. Israeli and Palestinian families used virtually the same words to describe their grief.

When the widow of a murdered Israeli physician – a man of peace whose practice included the treatment of Arab patients – tells us that it seems that Palestinians are interested in killing Jews for the sake of killing Jews, Palestinians should take notice. When the parents of a Palestinian child killed while in his bed by an errant bullet draw similar conclusions about the respect accorded by Israelis to Palestinian lives, Israelis need to listen. When we see the shattered bodies of children we know it is time for adults to stop the violence.

With widespread violence, both sides have resorted to portrayals of the other in hostile stereotypes. This cycle cannot be easily broken. Without considerable determination and readiness to compromise, the rebuilding of trust will be impossible.

Cessation of Violence: Since 1991, the parties have consistently committed themselves, in all their agreements, to the path of nonviolence. They did so most recently in the two Sharm el-Sheikh summits of September 1999 and October 2000. To stop the violence now, the PA and GOI need not 'reinvent the wheel.' Rather, they should take immediate steps to end the violence, reaffirm their mutual commitments, and resume negotiations.

Resumption of Security Cooperation: Palestinian security officials told us that it would take some time – perhaps several weeks – for the PA to reassert full control over armed elements nominally under its command and to exert decisive influence over other armed elements operating in Palestinian areas. Israeli security officials have not disputed these assertions. What is important is that the PA make an all-out effort to enforce a complete cessation of violence and that it be clearly seen by the GOI as doing so. The GOI must likewise exercise a 100 percent effort to ensure that potential friction points, where Palestinians come into contact with armed Israelis, do not become stages for renewed hostilities.

The collapse of security cooperation in early October reflected the belief by each party that the other had committed itself to a violent course of action. If the parties wish to attain the standard of 100 percent effort to prevent violence, the immediate resumption of security cooperation is mandatory.

We acknowledge the reluctance of the PA to be seen as facilitating the work of Israeli security services absent an explicit political context (i.e., meaningful negotiations) and under the threat of Israeli settlement expansion. Indeed, security cooperation cannot be sustained without such negotiations and with ongoing actions seen as prejudicing the outcome of negotiations. However, violence is much more likely to continue without security cooperation. Moreover, without effective security cooperation, the parties will continue to regard all acts of violence as officially sanctioned.

In order to overcome the current deadlock, the parties should consider how best to revitalize security cooperation. We commend current efforts to that end. Effective cooperation depends on recreating and sustaining an atmosphere of confidence and good personal relations. It is for the parties themselves to undertake the main burden of day-to-day cooperation, but they should remain open to engaging the assistance of others in facilitating that work. Such outside assistance should be by mutual consent, should not threaten good bilateral working arrangements, and should not act as a tribunal or interpose between the parties. There was good security cooperation until last year that benefited from the good offices of the US (acknowledged by both sides as useful), and was also supported indirectly by security projects and assistance from the European Union. The role of outside assistance should be that of creating the appropriate framework, sustaining goodwill on both sides, and removing friction where possible. That framework must be seen to be contributing to the safety and welfare of both communities if there is to be acceptance by those communities of these efforts.

REBUILD CONFIDENCE

The historic handshake between Chairman Arafat and the late Prime Minister Rabin at the White House in September 1993 symbolized the expectation of both parties that the door to the peaceful resolution of differences had been opened. Despite the current violence and mutual loss of trust, both communities have repeatedly expressed a desire for peace. Channeling this desire into substantive progress has proved difficult. The restoration of trust is essential, and the parties should take affirmative steps to this end. Given the high level of hostility and mistrust, the timing and sequence of these steps are obviously crucial. This can be decided only by the parties. We urge them to begin the process of decision immediately.

Terrorism: In the September 1999 Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the parties pledged to take action against 'any threat or act of terrorism, violence or incitement.' Although all three categories of hostilities are reprehensible, it was no accident that 'terrorism' was placed at the top of the list.

Terrorism involves the deliberate killing and injuring of randomly selected noncombatants for political ends. It seeks to promote a political outcome by spreading terror and demoralization throughout a population. It is immoral and ultimately self-defeating. We condemn it and we urge that the parties coordinate their security efforts to eliminate it.

In its official submissions and briefings, the GOI has accused the PA of supporting terrorism by releasing incarcerated terrorists, by allowing PA security personnel to abet, and in some cases to conduct terrorist operations, and by terminating security cooperation with the GOI. The PA vigorously denies the accusations. But Israelis hold the view that the PA's leadership has made no real effort over the past seven months to prevent anti-Israeli terrorism. The belief is, in and of itself, a major obstacle to the rebuilding of confidence.

We believe that the PA has a responsibility to help rebuild confidence by making clear to both communities that terrorism is reprehensible and unacceptable, and by taking all measures to prevent terrorist operations and to punish perpetrators. This effort should include immediate steps to apprehend and incarcerate terrorists operating within the PA's jurisdiction.

Settlements: The GOI also has a responsibility to help rebuild confidence. A cessation of Palestinian-Israeli violence will be particularly hard to sustain unless the GOI freezes all settlement construction activity. The GOI should also give careful consideration to whether settlements that are focal points for substantial friction are valuable bargaining chips for future negotiations or provocations likely to preclude the onset of productive talks.

The issue is, of course, controversial. Many Israelis will regard our recommendation as a statement of the obvious, and will support it. Many will oppose it. But settlement activities must not be allowed to undermine the restoration of calm and the resumption of negotiations.

Appendix 2: The Mitchell Report

During the half-century of its existence, Israel has had the strong support of the United States. In international forums, the US has at times cast the only vote on Israel's behalf. Yet, even in such a close relationship there are some differences. Prominent among those differences is the US Government's long-standing opposition to the GOI's policies and practices regarding settlements. As the then-Secretary of State, James A. Baker, III, commented on May 22, 1991:

Every time I have gone to Israel in connection with the peace process, on each of my four trips, I have been met with the announcement of new settlement activity. This does violate United States policy. It's the first thing that Arabs – Arab Governments, the first thing that the Palestinians in the territories – whose situation is really quite desperate – the first thing they raise when we talk to them. I don't think there is any bigger obstacle to peace than the settlement activity that continues not only unabated but at an enhanced pace.

The policy described by Secretary Baker, on behalf of the Administration of President George H. W. Bush, has been, in essence, the policy of every American administration over the past quarter century.

Most other countries, including Turkey, Norway, and those of the European Union, have also been critical of Israeli settlement activity, in accordance with their views that such settlements are illegal under international law and not in compliance with previous agreements.

On each of our two visits to the region there were Israeli announcements regarding expansion of settlements, and it was almost always the first issue raised by Palestinians with whom we met. During our last visit, we observed the impact of 6,400 settlers on 140,000 Palestinians in Hebron and 6,500 settlers on over 1,100,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The GOI describes its policy as prohibiting new settlements but permitting expansion of existing settlements to accommodate 'natural growth.' Palestinians contend that there is no distinction between 'new' and 'expanded' settlements; and that, except for a brief freeze during the tenure of Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin, there has been a continuing, aggressive effort by Israel to increase the number and size of settlements.

The subject has been widely discussed within Israel. The *Ha'aretz* English Language Edition editorial of April 10, 2001 stated:

A government which seeks to argue that its goal is to reach a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians through peaceful means, and is trying at this stage to bring an end to the violence and terrorism, must announce an end to construction in the settlements.

The circumstances in the region are much changed from those which existed nearly 20 years ago. Yet, President Reagan's words remain relevant: 'The

immediate adoption of a settlements freeze by Israel, more than any other action, could create the confidence needed [...]

Beyond the obvious confidence-building qualities of a settlement freeze, we note that many of the confrontations during this conflict have occurred at points where Palestinians, settlers, and security forces protecting the settlers, meet. Keeping both the peace and these friction points will be very difficult.

Reducing Tension: We were told by both Palestinians and Israelis that emotions generated by the many recent deaths and funerals have fueled additional confrontations, and, in effect, maintained the cycle of violence. We cannot urge one side or the other to refrain from demonstrations. But both sides must make clear that violent demonstrations will not be tolerated. We can and do urge that both sides exhibit a greater respect for human life when demonstrators confront security personnel. In addition, a renewed effort to stop the violence might feature, for a limited time, a 'cooling off' period during which public demonstrations at or near friction points will be discouraged in order to break the cycle of violence. To the extent that demonstrations continue, we urge that demonstrators and security personnel keep their distance from one another to reduce the potential for lethal confrontation.

Actions and Responses: Members of the Committee staff witnessed an incident involving stone throwing in Ramallah from the perspectives, on the ground, of both sides. The people confronting one another were mostly young men. The absence of senior leadership on the IDF side was striking. Likewise, the absence of responsible security and other officials counseling restraint on the Palestinian side was obvious.

Concerning such confrontations, the GOI takes the position that 'Israel is engaged in an armed conflict short of war. This is not a civilian disturbance or a demonstration or a riot. It is characterized by live-fire attacks on a significant scale [emphasis added]...[T]he attacks are carried out by a well-armed and organized militia...' Yet, the GOI acknowledges that of some 9,000 'attacks' by Palestinians against Israelis, 'some 2,700 [about 30 percent] involved the use of automatic weapons, rifles, hand guns, grenades, [and] explosives of other kinds.'

Thus, for the first three months of the current uprising, most incidents did not involve Palestinian use of firearms and explosives. B'Tselem reported that, 'according to IDF figures, 73 percent of the incidents [from September 29 to December 2, 2000] did not include Palestinian gunfire. Despite this, it was in these incidents that most of the Palestinians [were] killed and wounded...' Altogether, nearly 500 people were killed and over 10,000 injured over the past seven months; the overwhelming majority in both categories were Palestinian. Many of these deaths were avoidable, as were many Israeli deaths.

Israel's characterization of the conflict, as noted above, is overly broad, for it does not adequately describe the variety of incidents reported since late September 2000. Moreover, by thus defining the conflict, the IDF has

suspended its policy of mandating investigations by the Department of Military Police Investigations whenever a Palestinian in the territories dies at the hands of an IDF soldier in an incident not involving terrorism. In the words of the GOI, 'Where Israel considers that there is reason to investigate particular incidents, it does so, although, given the circumstances of armed conflict, it does not do so routinely.' We believe, however, that by abandoning the blanket 'armed conflict short of war' characterization and by re-instituting mandatory military police investigations, the GOI could help mitigate deadly violence and help rebuild mutual confidence. Notwithstanding the danger posed by stone-throwers, an effort should be made to differentiate between terrorism and protests.

Controversy has arisen between the parties over what Israel calls the 'targeting of individual enemy combatants.' The PLO describes these actions as 'extra-judicial executions,' and claims that Israel has engaged in an 'assassination policy' that is 'in clear violation of Article 32 of the Fourth Geneva Convention....' The GOI states that, 'whatever action Israel has taken has been taken firmly within the bounds of the relevant and accepted principles relating to the conduct of hostilities.'

With respect to demonstrations, the GOI has acknowledged 'that individual instances of excessive response may have occurred. To a soldier or a unit coming under Palestinian attack, the equation is not that of the Israeli army versus some stone throwing Palestinian protesters. It is a personal equation.'

We understand this concern, particularly since rocks can maim or even kill. It is no easy matter for a few young soldiers, confronted by large numbers of hostile demonstrators, to make fine legal distinctions on the spot. Still, this 'personal equation' must fit within an organizational ethic; in this case, The Ethical Code of the Israel Defense Forces, which states, in part:

The sanctity of human life in the eyes of the IDF servicemen will find expression in all of their actions, in deliberate and meticulous planning, in safe and intelligent training and in proper execution of their mission. In evaluating the risk to self and others, they will use the appropriate standards and will exercise constant care to limit injury to life to the extent required to accomplish the mission.

Those required to respect the IDF ethical code are largely draftees, as the IDF is a conscript force. Active duty enlisted personnel, non-commissioned officers and junior officers – the categories most likely to be present at friction points – are young, often teenagers. Unless more senior career personnel or reservists are stationed at friction points, no IDF personnel present in these sensitive areas have experience to draw upon from previous violent Israeli–Palestinian confrontations. We think it is essential, especially in the context of restoring confidence by minimizing deadly confrontations, that the IDF deploy more senior, experienced soldiers to these sensitive points.

There were incidents where IDF soldiers have used lethal force, including live ammunition and modified metal-cored rubber rounds, against unarmed demonstrators throwing stones. The IDF should adopt crowd-control tactics that minimize the potential for deaths and casualties, withdrawing metal-cored rubber rounds from general use and using instead rubber baton rounds without metal cores.

We are deeply concerned about the public safety implications of exchanges of fire between populated areas, in particular between Israeli settlements and neighboring Palestinian villages. Palestinian gunmen have directed small arms fire at Israeli settlements and at nearby IDF positions from within or adjacent to civilian dwellings in Palestinian areas, thus endangering innocent, Israeli and Palestinian civilians alike. We condemn the positioning of gunmen within or near civilian dwellings. The IDF often responds to such gunfire with heavy caliber weapons, sometimes resulting in deaths and injuries to innocent Palestinians. An IDF officer told us at the Ministry of Defense on March 23, 2001 that, 'When shooting comes from a building we respond, and sometimes there are innocent people in the building.' Obviously, innocent people are injured and killed during exchanges of this nature. We urge that such provocations cease and that the IDF exercise maximum restraint in its responses if they do occur. Inappropriate or excessive uses of force often lead to escalation.

We are aware of IDF sensitivities about these subjects. More than once we were asked: 'What about Palestinian rules of engagement? What about a Palestinian code of ethics for their military personnel?' These are valid questions.

On the Palestinian side there are disturbing ambiguities in the basic areas of responsibility and accountability. The lack of control exercised by the PA over its own security personnel and armed elements affiliated with the PA leadership is very troubling. We urge the PA to take all necessary steps to establish a clear and unchallenged chain of command for armed personnel operating under its authority. We recommend that the PA institute and enforce effective standards of conduct and accountability, both within the uniformed ranks and between the police and the civilian political leadership to which it reports.

Incitement: In their submissions and briefings to the Committee, both sides expressed concerns about hateful language and images emanating from the other, citing numerous examples of hostile sectarian and ethnic rhetoric in the Palestinian and Israeli media, in school curricula and in statements by religious leaders, politicians and others.

We call on the parties to renew their formal commitments to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and to abstain from incitement and hostile propaganda. We condemn hate language and incitement in all its forms. We suggest that the parties be particularly cautious about using words in a manner that suggests collective responsibility.

Economic and Social Impact of Violence: Further restrictions on the movement of people and goods have been imposed by Israel on the West

Bank and the Gaza Strip. These closures take three forms: those which restrict movement between the Palestinian areas and Israel; those (including curfews) which restrict movement within the Palestinian areas; and those which restrict movement from the Palestinian areas to foreign countries. These measures have disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians; they have increased Palestinian unemployment to an estimated 40 percent, in part by preventing some 140,000 Palestinians from working in Israel; and have stripped away about one-third of the Palestinian gross domestic product. Moreover, the transfer of tax and customs duty revenues owed to the PA by Israel has been suspended, leading to a serious fiscal crisis in the PA.

Of particular concern to the PA has been the destruction by Israeli security forces and settlers of tens of thousands of olive and fruit trees and other agricultural property. The closures have had other adverse effects, such as preventing civilians from access to urgent medical treatment and preventing students from attending school.

The GOI maintains that these measures were taken in order to protect Israeli citizens from terrorism. Palestinians characterize these measures as 'collective punishment.' The GOI denies the allegation:

Israel has not taken measures that have had an economic impact simply for the sake of taking such measures or for reasons of harming the Palestinian economy. The measures have been taken for reasons of security. Thus, for example, the closure of the Palestinian territories was taken in order to prevent, or at least minimize the risks of, terrorist attacks... The Palestinian leadership has made no attempt to control this activity and bring it to an end.

Moreover, the GOI points out that violence in the last quarter of 2000 cost the Israeli economy \$1.2 billion (USD), and that the loss continues at a rate of approximately \$150 million (USD) per month.

We acknowledge Israel's security concerns. We believe, however, that the GOI should lift closures, transfer to the PA all revenues owed, and permit Palestinians who have been employed in Israel to return to their jobs. Closure policies play into the hands of extremists seeking to expand their constituencies and thereby contribute to escalation. The PA should resume cooperation with Israeli security agencies to ensure that Palestinian workers employed within Israel are fully vetted and free of connections to terrorists and terrorist organizations.

International development assistance has from the start been an integral part of the peace process, with an aim to strengthen the socio-economic foundations for peace. This assistance today is more important than ever. We urge the international community to sustain the development agenda of the peace process.

Holy Places: It is particularly regrettable that places such as Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, Joseph's Tomb in Nablus, and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem have

been the scenes of violence, death and injury. These are places of peace, prayer and reflection which must be accessible to all believers.

Places deemed holy by Muslims, Jews, and Christians merit respect, protection and preservation. Agreements previously reached by the parties regarding holy places must be upheld. The GOI and the PA should create a joint initiative to defuse the sectarian aspect of their political dispute by preserving and protecting such places. Efforts to develop inter-faith dialogue should be encouraged.

International Force: One of the most controversial subjects raised during our inquiry was the issue of deploying an international force to the Palestinian areas. The PA is strongly in favor of having such a force to protect Palestinian civilians and their property from the IDF and from settlers. The GOI is just as adamantly opposed to an 'international protection force,' believing that it would prove unresponsive to Israeli security concerns and interfere with bilateral negotiations to settle the conflict.

We believe that to be effective such a force would need the support of both parties. We note that international forces deployed in this region have been or are in a position to fulfill their mandates and make a positive contribution only when they were deployed with the consent of all of the parties involved.

During our visit to Hebron, we were briefed by personnel of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), a presence to which both parties have agreed. The TIPH is charged with observing an explosive situation and writing reports on their observations. If the parties agree, as a confidence-building measure, to draw upon TIPH personnel to help them manage other friction points, we hope that TIPH contributors could accommodate such a request.

Cross-Community Initiatives: Many described to us the near absolute loss of trust. It was all the more inspiring, therefore, to find groups (such as the Parent's Circle and the Economic Cooperation Foundation) dedicated to cross-community understanding in spite of all that has happened. We commend them and their important work.

Regrettably, most of the work of this nature has stopped during the current conflict. To help rebuild confidence, the GOI and PA should jointly endorse and support the work of Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) already involved in confidence-building through initiatives linking both sides. It is important that the PA and GOI support cross-community organizations and initiatives, including the provision of humanitarian assistance to Palestinian villages by Israeli NGOs. Providing travel permits for participants is essential. Cooperation between the humanitarian organizations and the military/security services of the parties should be encouraged and institutionalized.

Such programs can help build, albeit slowly, constituencies for peace among Palestinians and Israelis and can provide safety nets during times of turbulence. Organizations involved in this work are vital for translating good intentions into positive actions.

RESUME NEGOTIATIONS

Israeli leaders do not wish to be perceived as 'rewarding violence.' Palestinian leaders do not wish to be perceived as 'rewarding occupation.' We appreciate the political constraints on leaders of both sides. Nevertheless, if the cycle of violence is to be broken and the search for peace resumed, there needs to be a new bilateral relationship incorporating both security cooperation and negotiations.

We cannot prescribe to the parties how best to pursue their political objectives. Yet the construction of a new bilateral relationship solidifying and transcending an agreed cessation of violence requires intelligent risk-taking. It requires, in the first instance, that each party again be willing to regard the other as a partner. Partnership, in turn, requires at this juncture something more than was agreed in the Declaration of Principles and in subsequent agreements. Instead of declaring the peace process to be 'dead,' the parties should determine how they will conclude their common journey along their agreed 'road map,' a journey which began in Madrid and continued – in spite of problems – until very recently.

To define a starting point is for the parties to decide. Both parties have stated that they remain committed to their mutual agreements and undertakings. It is time to explore further implementation. The parties should declare their intention to meet on this basis, in order to resume full and meaningful negotiations, in the spirit of their undertakings at Sharm el-Sheikh in 1999 and 2000.

Neither side will be able to achieve its principal objectives unilaterally or without political risk. We know how hard it is for leaders to act – especially if the action can be characterized by political opponents as a concession – without getting something in return. The PA must – as it has at previous critical junctures – take steps to reassure Israel on security matters. The GOI must – as it has in the past – take steps to reassure the PA on political matters. Israelis and Palestinians should avoid, in their own actions and attitudes, giving extremists, common criminals and revenge seekers the final say in defining their joint future. This will not be easy if deadly incidents occur in spite of effective cooperation. Notwithstanding the daunting difficulties, the very foundation of the trust required to re-establish a functioning partnership consists of each side making such strategic reassurances to the other.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The GOI and the PA must act swiftly and decisively to halt the violence. Their immediate objectives then should be to rebuild confidence and resume negotiations. What we are asking is not easy. Palestinians and Israelis – not just their leaders, but two publics at large – have lost confidence in one another. We are asking political leaders to do, for the sake of their people, the politically difficult: to lead without knowing how many will follow.

During this mission our aim has been to fulfill the mandate agreed at Sharm el-Sheikh. We value the support given our work by the participants at

the summit, and we commend the parties for their cooperation. Our principal recommendation is that they recommit themselves to the Sharm el-Sheikh spirit, and that they implement the decisions made there in 1999 and 2000. We believe that the summit participants will support bold action by the parties to achieve these objectives.

END THE VIOLENCE

- The GOI and the PA should reaffirm their commitment to existing agreements and undertakings and should immediately implement an unconditional cessation of violence.

Anything less than a complete effort by both parties to end the violence will render the effort itself ineffective, and will likely be interpreted by the other side as evidence of hostile intent.

- The GOI and PA should immediately resume security cooperation.

Effective bilateral cooperation aimed at preventing violence will encourage the resumption of negotiations. We are particularly concerned that, absent effective, transparent security cooperation, terrorism and other acts of violence will continue and may be seen as officially sanctioned whether they are or not. The parties should consider widening the scope of security cooperation to reflect the priorities of both communities and to seek acceptance for these efforts from those communities.

We acknowledge the PA's position that security cooperation presents a political difficulty absent a suitable political context, i.e., the relaxation of stringent Israeli security measures combined with ongoing, fruitful negotiations. We also acknowledge the PA's fear that, with security cooperation in hand, the GOI may not be disposed to deal forthrightly with Palestinian political concerns. We believe that security cooperation cannot long be sustained if meaningful negotiations are unreasonably deferred, if security measures 'on the ground' are seen as hostile, or if steps are taken that are perceived as provocative or as prejudicing the outcome of negotiations.

REBUILD CONFIDENCE

- The PA and GOI should work together to establish a meaningful 'cooling off period' and implement additional confidence building measures, some of which were proposed in the October 2000 Sharm el-Sheikh Statement and some of which were offered by the US on January 7, 2001 in Cairo.
- The PA and GOI should resume their efforts to identify, condemn and discourage incitement in all its forms.
- The PA should make clear through concrete action to Palestinians and Israelis alike that terrorism is reprehensible and unacceptable, and that the PA will make a 100 percent effort to prevent terrorist operations and to punish perpetrators. This effort should include immediate steps to apprehend and incarcerate terrorists operating within the PA's jurisdiction.

Appendix 2: The Mitchell Report

- The GOI should freeze all settlement activity, including the 'natural growth' of existing settlements.
- The kind of security cooperation desired by the GOI cannot for long co-exist with settlement activity described very recently by the European Union as causing 'great concern' and by the US as 'provocative.'
- The GOI should give careful consideration to whether settlements which are focal points for substantial friction are valuable bargaining chips for future negotiations or provocations likely to preclude the onset of productive talks.
- The GOI may wish to make it clear to the PA that a future peace would pose no threat to the territorial contiguity of a Palestinian State to be established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- The IDF should consider withdrawing to positions held before September 28, 2000, which will reduce the number of friction points and the potential for violent confrontations.
- The GOI should ensure that the IDF adopt and enforce policies and procedures encouraging non-lethal responses to unarmed demonstrators, with a view to minimizing casualties and friction between the two communities. The IDF should:
 - Re-institute, as a matter of course, military police investigations into Palestinian deaths resulting from IDF actions in the Palestinian territories in incidents not involving terrorism. The IDF should abandon the blanket characterization of the current uprising as 'an armed conflict short of war,' which fails to discriminate between terrorism and protest.
 - Adopt tactics of crowd-control that minimize the potential for deaths and casualties, including the withdrawal of metal-cored rubber rounds from general use.
 - Ensure that experienced, seasoned personnel are present for duty at all times at known friction points.
 - Ensure that the stated values and standard operating procedures of the IDF effectively instill the duty of caring for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as Israelis living there, consistent with The Ethical Code of The IDF.
- The GOI should lift closures, transfer to the PA all tax revenues owed, and permit Palestinians who had been employed in Israel to return to their jobs; and should ensure that security forces and settlers refrain from the destruction of homes and roads, as well as trees and other agricultural property in Palestinian areas. We acknowledge the GOI's position that actions of this nature have been taken for security reasons. Nevertheless, their economic effects will persist for years.
- The PA should renew cooperation with Israeli security agencies to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, that Palestinian workers employed within Israel are fully vetted and free of connections to organizations and individuals engaged in terrorism.

- The PA should prevent gunmen from using Palestinian populated areas to fire upon Israeli populated areas and IDF positions. This tactic places civilians on both sides at unnecessary risk.
- The GOI and IDF should adopt and enforce policies and procedures designed to ensure that the response to any gunfire emanating from Palestinian populated areas minimizes the danger to the lives and property of Palestinian civilians, bearing in mind that it is probably the objective of gunmen to elicit an excessive IDF response.
- The GOI should take all necessary steps to prevent acts of violence by settlers.
- The parties should abide by the provisions of the Wye River Agreement prohibiting illegal weapons.
- The PA should take all necessary steps to establish a clear and unchallenged chain of command for armed personnel operating under its authority.
- The PA should institute and enforce effective standards of conduct and accountability, both within the uniformed ranks and between the police and the civilian political leadership to which it reports.
- The PA and GOI should consider a joint undertaking to preserve and protect holy places sacred to the traditions of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. An initiative of this nature might help to reverse a disturbing trend: the increasing use of religious themes to encourage and justify violence.
- The GOI and PA should jointly endorse and support the work of Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in cross-community initiatives linking the two peoples. It is important that these activities, including the provision of humanitarian aid to Palestinian villages by Israeli NGOs, receive the full backing of both parties.

RESUME NEGOTIATIONS

- We reiterate our belief that a 100 percent effort to stop the violence, an immediate resumption of security cooperation and an exchange of confidence building measures are all important for the resumption of negotiations. Yet none of these steps will long be sustained absent a return to serious negotiations.

It is not within our mandate to prescribe the venue, the basis or the agenda of negotiations. However, in order to provide an effective political context for practical cooperation between the parties, negotiations must not be unreasonably deferred and they must, in our view, manifest a spirit of compromise, reconciliation and partnership, notwithstanding the events of the past seven months.

- In the spirit of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements and understandings of 1999 and 2000, we recommend that the parties meet to reaffirm their commitment to signed agreements and mutual understandings, and take corresponding action. This should be the basis for resuming full and meaningful negotiations.

Appendix 2: The Mitchell Report

The parties are at a crossroads. If they do not return to the negotiating table, they face the prospect of fighting it out for years on end, with many of their citizens leaving for distant shores to live their lives and raise their children. We pray they make the right choice. That means stopping the violence now. Israelis and Palestinians have to live, work, and prosper together. History and geography have destined them to be neighbors. That cannot be changed. Only when their actions are guided by this awareness will they be able to develop the vision and reality of peace and shared prosperity.

Suleyman Demirel

9th President of the Republic of Turkey

Thorbjoern Jagland

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway

George J. Mitchell, Chairman

Former Member and Majority Leader of the United States Senate

Warren B. Rudman

Former Member of the United States Senate

Javier Solana

High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy,

European Union

APPENDIX 3

The Tenet Plan

Palestinian–Israeli Security Implementation Work Plan 10 June 2001

The security organizations of the Government of Israel (GOI) and of the Palestinian Authority (PA) reaffirm their commitment to the security agreements forged at Sharm al-Sheikh in October 2000 embedded in the Mitchell Report of April 2001.

The operational premise of the work plan is that the two sides are committed to a mutual, comprehensive cease-fire, applying to all violent activities, in accordance with the public declaration of both leaders. In addition, the joint security committee referenced in this work plan will resolve issues that may arise during the implementation of this workplan.

The security organizations of the GOI and PA agree to initiate the following specific, concrete, and realistic security steps immediately to reestablish security cooperation and the situation on the ground as they existed prior to 28 September.

1. The GOI and the PA will immediately resume security cooperation.
 - A senior-level meeting of Israeli, Palestinian, and US security officials will be held immediately and will reconvene at least once a week, with mandatory participation by designated senior officials.
 - Israeli–Palestinian DCOs will be reinvigorated. They will carry out their daily activities, to the maximum extent possible, according to the standards established prior to 28 September 2000. As soon as the security situation permits, barriers to effective cooperation – which include the erection of walls between the Israeli and Palestinian sides – will be eliminated and joint Israeli–Palestinian patrols will be reinitiated.

Appendix 3: The Tenet Plan

- ♦ US-supplied video conferencing systems will be provided to senior-level Israeli and Palestinian officials to facilitate frequent dialogue and security cooperation.
- 2. Both sides will take immediate measures to enforce strict adherence to the declared cease-fire and to stabilize the security environment.
 - ♦ Specific procedures will be developed by the senior-level security committee to ensure the secure movement of GOI and PA security personnel traveling in areas outside their respective control, in accordance with existing agreements.
 - ♦ Israel will not conduct attacks of any kind against the Palestinian Authority Ra'is facilities: the headquarters of Palestinian security, intelligence, and police organization; or prisons in the West Bank and Gaza.
 - ♦ The PA will move immediately to apprehend, question, and incarcerate terrorists in the West Bank and Gaza and will provide the security committee the names of those arrested as soon as they are apprehended, as well as a readout of actions taken.
 - ♦ Israel will release all Palestinians arrested in security sweeps who have no association with terrorist activities.
 - ♦ In keeping with its unilateral cease-fire declaration, the PA will stop any Palestinian security officials from inciting, aiding, abetting, or conducting attacks against Israeli targets, including settlers.
 - ♦ In keeping with Israel's unilateral cease-fire declaration, Israeli forces will not conduct 'proactive' security operations in areas under the control of the PA or attacks against innocent civilian targets.
 - ♦ The GOI will re-institute military police investigations into Palestinian deaths resulting from IDF actions in the West Bank and Gaza in incidents not involving terrorism.
- 3. Palestinian and Israeli security officials will use the security committee to provide each other, as well as designated US officials, terrorist threat information, including information on known or suspected terrorist operation in – or moving to – areas under the other's control.
 - ♦ Legitimate terrorist and threat information will be acted upon immediately, with follow-up actions and results reported to the security committee.
 - ♦ The PA will undertake preemptive operations against terrorists, terrorist safehouses, arms depots, and mortar factories. The PA will provide regular progress reports of these actions to the security committee.
 - ♦ Israeli authorities will take action against Israeli citizens inciting, carrying out, or planning to carry out violence against Palestinians, with progress reports on these activities provided to the security committee.
- 4. The PA and GOI will move aggressively to prevent individuals and groups from using areas under their respective control to carry out acts of violence. In addition, both sides will take steps to ensure that areas under their control will not be used to launch attacks against the other side nor be used as refuge after attacks are staged.

- The security committee will identify key flash points, and each side will inform the other of the names of senior security personnel responsible for each flash point.
- Joint Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be developed for each flash point. These SOPs will address how the two sides handle and respond to security incidents; the mechanisms for emergency contact; and the procedures to deescalate security crises.
- Palestinian and Israeli security officials will identify and agree to the practical measures needed to enforce 'no demonstration zones' and 'buffer zones' around flash points to reduce opportunities for confrontation. Both sides will adopt all necessary measures to prevent riots and to control demonstration, particularly in flash point areas.
- Palestinian and Israeli security officials will make a concerted effort to locate and confiscate illegal weapons, including mortars, rockets, and explosives, in areas under their respective control. In addition, intensive efforts will be made to prevent smuggling and illegal production of weapons. Each side will inform the security committee of the status and success of these efforts.
- The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) will adopt additional non-lethal measures to deal with Palestinian crowds and demonstrators, and more generally, seek to minimize the danger to lives and property of Palestinian civilians in responding to violence.

5. The GOI and the PA, through the auspices of the senior-level security committee, will forge – within one week of the commencement of security committee meetings and resumption of security cooperation – an agreed-upon schedule to implement the complete redeployment of IDF forces to positions held before 28 September 2000.

- Demonstrable on-the-ground redeployment will be initiated within the first 48 hours of this one-week period and will continue while the schedule is being forged.

6. Within one week of the commencement of security committee meetings and resumption of security cooperation, a specific timeline will be developed for the lifting of internal closures as well as for the reopening of internal roads, the Allenby Bridge, Gaza Airport, Port of Gaza, and border crossings. Security checkpoints will be minimized according to legitimate security requirements and following consultation between the two sides.

- Demonstrable on-the-ground actions on the lifting of the closures will be initiated within the first 48 hours of this one-week period and will continue while the timeline is being developed.

The parties pledge that even if untoward events occur, security cooperation will continue through the joint security committee.

APPENDIX 4

The Roadmap

30 April 2003

The full text of a performance-based roadmap to a permanent two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, presented to Palestinian and Israeli leaders by Quartet mediators: the United Nations, European Union, United States and Russia

The following is a performance-based and goal-driven road map, with clear phases, timelines, target dates, and benchmarks aiming at progress through reciprocal steps by the two parties in the political, security, economic, humanitarian, and institution-building fields, under the auspices of the Quartet.

The destination is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by 2005, as presented in President Bush's speech of 24 June, and welcomed by the EU, Russia and the UN in the 16 July and 17 September Quartet Ministerial statements.

A two state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict will only be achieved through an end to violence and terrorism, when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror and willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty, and through Israel's readiness to do what is necessary for a democratic Palestinian state to be established, and a clear, unambiguous acceptance by both parties of the goal of a negotiated settlement as described below.

The Quartet will assist and facilitate implementation of the plan, starting in Phase I, including direct discussions between the parties as required.

The plan establishes a realistic timeline for implementation.

However, as a performance-based plan, progress will require and depend upon the good faith efforts of the parties, and their compliance with each of the obligations outlined below.

Peace Negotiations in Palestine

Should the parties perform their obligations rapidly, progress within and through the phases may come sooner than indicated in the plan.

Non-compliance with obligations will impede progress.

A settlement, negotiated between the parties, will result in the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

The settlement will resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and end the occupation that began in 1967, based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, UNSCRs 242, 338 and 1397, agreements previously reached by the parties, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah – endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit – calling for acceptance of Israel as a neighbour living in peace and security, in the context of a comprehensive settlement.

This initiative is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

The Quartet will meet regularly at senior levels to evaluate the parties' performance on implementation of the plan. In each phase, the parties are expected to perform their obligations in parallel, unless otherwise indicated.

Phase I: Ending terror and violence, normalising Palestinian life, and building Palestinian institutions (present to May 2003)

In Phase I, the Palestinians immediately undertake an unconditional cessation of violence according to the steps outlined below; such action should be accompanied by supportive measures undertaken by Israel.

Palestinians and Israelis resume security co-operation based on the Tenet work plan to end violence, terrorism, and incitement through restructured and effective Palestinian security services.

Palestinians undertake comprehensive political reform in preparation for statehood, including drafting a Palestinian constitution, and free, fair and open elections upon the basis of those measures.

Israel takes all necessary steps to help normalise Palestinian life.

Israel withdraws from Palestinian areas occupied from September 28, 2000 and the two sides restore the status quo that existed at that time, as security performance and co-operation progress.

Israel also freezes all settlement activity, consistent with the Mitchell Report.

At the outset of Phase I:

- Palestinian leadership issues unequivocal statement reiterating Israel's right to exist in peace and security and calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire to end armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere. All official Palestinian institutions end incitement against Israel.

- Israeli leadership issues unequivocal statement affirming its commitment to the two-state vision of an independent, viable, sovereign Palestinian state living in peace and security alongside Israel, as expressed by President Bush, and calling for an immediate end to violence against Palestinians everywhere. All official Israeli institutions end incitement against Palestinians.

Security

- Palestinians declare an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism and undertake visible efforts on the ground to arrest, disrupt, and restrain individuals and groups conducting and planning violent attacks on Israelis anywhere.
- Rebuilt and refocused Palestinian Authority security apparatus begins sustained, targeted, and effective operations aimed at confronting all those engaged in terror and dismantlement of terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. This includes commencing confiscation of illegal weapons and consolidation of security authority, free of association with terror and corruption.
- GOI takes no actions undermining trust, including deportations, attacks on civilians; confiscation and/or demolition of Palestinian homes and property, as a punitive measure or to facilitate Israeli construction; destruction of Palestinian institutions and infrastructure; and other measures specified in the Tenet work plan.
- Relying on existing mechanisms and on-the-ground resources, Quartet representatives begin informal monitoring and consult with the parties on establishment of a formal monitoring mechanism and its implementation.
- Implementation, as previously agreed, of US rebuilding, training and resumed security co-operation plan in collaboration with outside oversight board (US-Egypt-Jordan). Quartet support for efforts to achieve a lasting, comprehensive ceasefire.
 - All Palestinian security organizations are consolidated into three services reporting to an empowered Interior Minister.
 - Restructured/retrained Palestinian security forces and IDF counterparts progressively resume security co-operation and other undertakings in implementation of the Tenet work plan, including regular senior-level meetings, with the participation of US security officials.
- Arab states cut off public and private funding and all other forms of support for groups supporting and engaging in violence and terror.
- All donors providing budgetary support for the Palestinians channel these funds through the Palestinian Ministry of Finance's Single Treasury Account.
- As comprehensive security performance moves forward, IDF withdraws progressively from areas occupied since 28 September 2000 and the two sides restore the status quo that existed prior to 28 September 2000. Palestinian security forces redeploy to areas vacated by IDF.

Palestinian institution-building

- Immediate action on credible process to produce draft constitution for Palestinian statehood. As rapidly as possible, constitutional committee circulates draft Palestinian constitution, based on strong parliamentary democracy and cabinet with empowered prime minister, for public comment/ debate. Constitutional committee proposes draft document for submission after elections for approval by appropriate Palestinian institutions.
- Appointment of interim prime minister or cabinet with empowered executive authority/decision-making body.
- GOI fully facilitates travel of Palestinian officials for PLC and cabinet sessions, internationally supervised security retraining, electoral and other reform activity, and other supportive measures related to the reform efforts.
- Continued appointment of Palestinian ministers empowered to undertake fundamental reform. Completion of further steps to achieve genuine separation of powers, including any necessary Palestinian legal reforms for this purpose.
- Establishment of independent Palestinian election commission. PLC reviews and revises election law.
- Palestinian performance on judicial, administrative, and economic benchmarks, as established by the International Task Force on Palestinian Reform.
- As early as possible, and based upon the above measures and in the context of open debate and transparent candidate selection/electoral campaign based on a free, multi-party process, Palestinians hold free, open, and fair elections.
- GOI facilitates Task Force election assistance, registration of voters, movement of candidates and voting officials. Support for NGOs involved in the election process.
- GOI reopens Palestinian Chamber of Commerce and other closed Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem based on a commitment that these institutions operate strictly in accordance with prior agreements between the parties.

Humanitarian response

- Israel takes measures to improve the humanitarian situation. Israel and Palestinians implement in full all recommendations of the Bertini report to improve humanitarian conditions, lifting curfews and easing restrictions on movement of persons and goods, and allowing full, safe, and unfettered access of international and humanitarian personnel.
- AHLC reviews the humanitarian situation and prospects for economic development in the West Bank and Gaza and launches a major donor assistance effort, including to the reform effort.
- GOI and PA continue revenue clearance process and transfer of funds, including arrears, in accordance with agreed, transparent monitoring mechanism.

Civil society

- Continued donor support, including increased funding through PVOs/NGOs, for people to people programs, private sector development and civil society initiatives.

Settlements

- GOI immediately dismantles settlement outposts erected since March 2001.
- Consistent with the Mitchell Report, GOI freezes all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements).

Phase II: Transition (June 2003–December 2003)

In the second phase, efforts are focused on the option of creating an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and attributes of sovereignty, based on the new constitution, as a way station to a permanent status settlement.

As has been noted, this goal can be achieved when the Palestinian people have a leadership acting decisively against terror, willing and able to build a practicing democracy based on tolerance and liberty.

With such a leadership, reformed civil institutions and security structures, the Palestinians will have the active support of the Quartet and the broader international community in establishing an independent, viable, state.

Progress into Phase II will be based upon the consensus judgment of the Quartet of whether conditions are appropriate to proceed, taking into account performance of both parties.

Furthering and sustaining efforts to normalise Palestinian lives and build Palestinian institutions, Phase II starts after Palestinian elections and ends with possible creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders in 2003.

Its primary goals are continued comprehensive security performance and effective security co-operation, continued normalisation of Palestinian life and institution-building, further building on and sustaining of the goals outlined in Phase I, ratification of a democratic Palestinian constitution, formal establishment of office of prime minister, consolidation of political reform, and the creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders.

- **International conference:** Convened by the Quartet, in consultation with the parties, immediately after the successful conclusion of Palestinian elections, to support Palestinian economic recovery and launch a process, leading to establishment of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders.
 - Such a meeting would be inclusive, based on the goal of a comprehensive Middle East peace (including between Israel and Syria, and Israel and Lebanon), and based on the principles described in the preamble to this document.

- Arab states restore pre-intifada links to Israel (trade offices, etc.).
- Revival of multilateral engagement on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees, and arms control issues.
- New constitution for democratic, independent Palestinian state is finalised and approved by appropriate Palestinian institutions. Further elections, if required, should follow approval of the new constitution.
- Empowered reform cabinet with office of prime minister formally established, consistent with draft constitution.
- Continued comprehensive security performance, including effective security cooperation on the bases laid out in Phase I.
- Creation of an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders through a process of Israeli–Palestinian engagement, launched by the international conference. As part of this process, implementation of prior agreements, to enhance maximum territorial contiguity, including further action on settlements in conjunction with establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders.
- Enhanced international role in monitoring transition, with the active, sustained, and operational support of the Quartet.
- Quartet members promote international recognition of Palestinian state, including possible UN membership.

Phase III: Permanent status agreement and end of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (2004–2005)

Progress into Phase III, based on consensus judgment of Quartet, and taking into account actions of both parties and Quartet monitoring.

Phase III objectives are consolidation of reform and stabilisation of Palestinian institutions, sustained, effective Palestinian security performance, and Israeli–Palestinian negotiations aimed at a permanent status agreement in 2005.

- **Second international conference:** Convened by Quartet, in consultation with the parties, at beginning of 2004 to endorse agreement reached on an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and formally to launch a process with the active, sustained, and operational support of the Quartet, leading to a final, permanent status resolution in 2005, including on borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements; and, to support progress toward a comprehensive Middle East settlement between Israel and Lebanon and Israel and Syria, to be achieved as soon as possible.
- Continued comprehensive, effective progress on the reform agenda laid out by the Task Force in preparation for final status agreement.
- Continued sustained and effective security performance, and sustained, effective security cooperation on the bases laid out in Phase I.

Appendix 4: The Roadmap

- International efforts to facilitate reform and stabilise Palestinian institutions and the Palestinian economy, in preparation for final status agreement.
- Parties reach final and comprehensive permanent status agreement that ends the Israel–Palestinian conflict in 2005, through a settlement negotiated between the parties based on UNSCR 242, 338, and 1397, that ends the occupation that began in 1967, and includes an agreed, just, fair, and realistic solution to the refugee issue, and a negotiated resolution on the status of Jerusalem that takes into account the political and religious concerns of both sides, and protects the religious interests of Jews, Christians, and Muslims worldwide, and fulfils the vision of two states, Israel and sovereign, independent, democratic and viable Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.
- Arab state acceptance of full normal relations with Israel and security for all the states of the region in the context of a comprehensive Arab–Israeli peace.



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Ahmed Qurei ('Abu Ala')

has been a leading member of the Palestinian negotiating team since the Oslo talks. He was Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority from November 2003 to January 2006. He is the author of *From Oslo to Jerusalem: The Palestinian Story of the Secret Negotiations* (2006) and *Beyond Oslo: Inside the Middle East Peace Process from Rabin's Death to Camp David* (2008), both published by I.B.Tauris.

Front: Israeli border guards stand atop a roof adjacent to Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, 26 September 2003 © Marco Di Lauro/Getty.

Back: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei give a press conference in Arafat's besieged Muqataa compound, on July 27 2004 in Ramallah, West Bank © Archive of H.E. Ahmed Qurei.

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